



**BOARD OF TRUSTEES
ELK ISLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

SPECIAL
MEETING

THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2023

Boardroom
Central Services Office

AGENDA

Mission: To provide high-quality, student-centred education

9:00 am 1. **CALL TO ORDER** T. Boymook

2. **IN-CAMERA SESSION**

10:00 am 3. **LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

4. **ANDREW SCHOOL** M. Liguori
(encl.)

ADJOURNMENT

RECOMMENDATION: BOARD OF TRUSTEES MAY 4/23 SPECIAL MEETING

2. That the Board meet in camera.
That the Board revert to regular session.
3. *Land and People Acknowledgement*
- 4.1 That the Board of Trustees approves the closure of Andrew School effective June 30, 2023, and if approved;
- 4.2 That the Board of Trustees approves transportation Option B which designates Kindergarten to Grade 6 students residing within the Village of Andrew to Mundare School. Students residing outside the Village of Andrew but inside the Andrew Elementary Boundary attendance area will follow the current Lamont Junior/Senior and Vegreville Junior/Senior attendance boundaries.



RECOMMENDATION REPORT

DATE: May 4, 2023

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Mark Liguori, Superintendent

SUBJECT: Andrew School

ORIGINATOR: Mark Liguori, Superintendent

RESOURCE STAFF: Sandra Stoddard, Associate Superintendent, Supports for Students
Brent Billey, Associate Superintendent, Human Resources
Dave Antymniuk, Division Principal, Education Executive
Lisa Weder, Director, Student Transportation
Laura McNabb, Director, Communication Services
Calvin Wait, Director, Facility Services
Brent Dragon, Assistant Director, Planning
Candace Cole, Secretary-Treasurer, Business Services

REFERENCE: *Education Act, Section 62, Closure of schools*
Board Policy 15: School Closure and Program Reduction

EIPS PRIORITY: Promote growth and success for all students
Enhance high-quality learning and working environments

EIPS GOAL: Success for every student
Quality infrastructure for all

EIPS OUTCOME: Students are engaged with their learning and achieve student-learning outcomes.
Learning and working environments are supported by effective planning, management and investment in Division infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the Board of Trustees approves the closure of Andrew School effective June 30, 2023, and if approved;
2. That the Board of Trustees approves transportation Option B which designates kindergarten to Grade 6 students residing within the Village of Andrew to Mundare School. Students residing outside the Village of Andrew but inside the Andrew Elementary Boundary attendance area will follow the current Lamont Junior/Senior and Vegreville Junior/Senior attendance boundaries.



RECOMMENDATION REPORT

BACKGROUND:

Andrew School is a kindergarten to Grade 6 school located in the Village of Andrew, a small rural farming community in the northeast region of Lamont County. The Board of Trustees of Elk Island Public Schools is the registered owner of the Andrew School site. The Village of Andrew owns a facility adjoined to the Andrew School and the Board shared in the construction costs of this facility—namely a library, corridor and a mechanical room. Currently, the Village of Andrew leases from the Board the land required for this facility, which includes parking, grounds and sidewalks. The lease was established at a dollar over a period of 99 years. Also, Elk Island Public Schools pays all utility, custodial, and maintenance costs for the adjoined facility.

The 2021 Census reported a population of 366 in the Village of Andrew census subdivision. An analysis of census data from 2016-21 shows an overall population decline of 13.9 per cent for the Village of Andrew (see Attachment 4 - Census - Population Change).

The original Andrew School was constructed in 1957 with an area of 1,026 square metres. Additions were done in 1964, 1980, and 1991 to bring the total gross floor area of Andrew School to 3,556 square metres. Following that, the Village of Andrew added 859 square metres along with 80 square metres of circulation space for a combined building total gross area of 4,495 square metres. The series of additions and renovations to Andrew School were completed to improve the facility condition as well as teaching and learning environments.

With respect to the facility condition of Andrew School facility, over the life of the school building, there have been numerous roof leaks, ice damming issues and sprinkler system leaks. As a result, interior damage to drywall and flooring has occurred. The cost to repair the damage to Andrew School and the Village offices, from January 2017 to date, has been approximately \$305,000. Furthermore, since 2015, maintenance and renovation work completed on the Andrew School building amounts to an additional \$680,000.

As well, the Andrew School sprinkler system installation, dating back to 1992, has been questionable. In 2003 the sprinkler system froze, flooding the school and town hall. It was determined the sprinkler system piping was degraded due to standing water in the sprinkler piping. As such, an annual preventative maintenance program was put in place to drain the low spots on the sprinkler system in the fall to prevent further flooding. An inspection of the system was undertaken this past year by Global Tech Group to determine pipe routing within the school, level of corrosion and sediment in the system. To facilitate the inspection, access above the gypsum board ceilings was required and it was found at that time the sprinkler system was being used incorrectly. It had been installed as a dry system, which has no slope to the piping, rather than a wet system, which has a slope for drainage. An estimate to replace the sprinkler system in its entirety has been provided at a cost of 1,020,000, not including contingency, asbestos abatement or GST.

As noted above, over the life of the building there have been many leaks causing damage throughout the structure. Roof repairs have been undertaken as required, as well as the introduction of heat tracing to address ice damming that has occurred on an annual basis. On February 18, 2022, EIPS commissioned Elements Roof Management Consulting to conduct and evaluate the condition of the steel roofing and other roofing assemblies installed on the building. The purpose of the roof evaluation was to review locations where water entry or condensation is occurring and correlate this moisture activity to the installation characteristics of the steel roof, the ventilation aspects of the roof assembly and ice damming phenomena. The cost to replace the steel roof in its entirety with ventilation and membrane upgrades is \$2,272,900—not including contingency, asbestos abatement, or GST. The building is at the end of its functional life and without a significant investment of approximately \$3,292,900 by both EIPS and the Village of Andrew, the building will not be occupiable in the immediate future.

In addition to infrastructure concerns, Andrew School continues to have declining student enrolment. Historically, Andrew School was a K-12 school, but a consistent drop in student registration, as well as programming challenges at both the senior and junior high level, led to program closures. The senior high program closed June 30, 2019, at which time there were 18 students registered in grades 10-12. The junior high program closed on June 30, 2020, at which time there were 10 students registered in grades 7-9. While the school may be an important fixture in the community, providing a hub for the village and adjacent rural areas, a historical trend of declining enrolment has made it increasingly challenging to provide high quality educational programming for students.

Currently, Andrew School has a student capacity of 385; however, as of September 29, 2022, only 62 kindergarten to Grade 6 students were registered for the 2022-23 school year—for a total utilization rate of 15 per cent. Data indicates that there are 72 students in kindergarten to Grade 6 who reside within the attendance boundary and attend an EIPS school – with 61 attending Andrew School and one additional student from outside the Division. The current staffing levels at the school include: one administrator, 3.5 FTE teachers, 3.0 FTE Educational Assistants, one part-time librarian and 1.0 FTE office support staff. In reviewing the current enrolment data for the 2022-23 school year, a total of 11 students who reside within the Andrew attendance area chose to attend another EIPS school:

- Mundare School: 3 students
- Lamont Elementary: 8 students

As of March 1, 2023, the total projected student population for the 2023-24 school year continues to decrease with only 44 student registrations. The breakdown is as follows:

- Kindergarten: 3 students
- Grade 1: 15 students
- Grade 2: 8 students
- Grade 3: 3 students
- Grade 4: 5 students
- Grade 5: 6 students
- Grade 6: 4 students

These numbers would necessitate classroom configurations of a K/1/2 combined classroom with 26 students when the kindergarten students attend half time programming and 23 students when the kindergarten students do not attend. Furthermore, the second classroom configuration would be a 3/4/5/6 combined classroom comprised of 18 students. Both scenarios highlighted above would not provide quality programming for teachers or learners.

Looking forward, the number of pre-school aged children—that's children aged one, two, three or four, who are eligible to attend Andrew School—is projected to be 30. In 2021 the number of pre-school aged children was 40, indicating the decreasing enrolment trend is anticipated to continue.

As noted above, low student enrolment and the viability of the Andrew school have been long-term concerns. From October 2018 to April 2019, EIPS engaged in seven consultations sessions with stakeholders regarding a potential program closure of grades 7-12 at Andrew School. Of these sessions, four were public meetings - held on November 22, 2018, February 20, 2019, April 11, 2019, and May 9, 2019. On June 6, 2019, the Board of Trustees approved the closure of the grades 10-12 program at Andrew School, with hopes that the school could become a robust K-9 program. Unfortunately, low enrolment trends continued to persist and on May 14, 2020, the Board of



Trustees approved the closure of grades 7-9 at Andrew School. On April 25, 2023, a further public meeting was held with the Village of Andrew to discuss the potential closure of the elementary program. Attachment 8 provides a summary of the meeting.

CONSIDERATIONS AND ANALYSIS:

I. How would affect the attendance area defined by the school

The current Andrew School attendance boundary covers a wide area. Its most easterly boundary is Range Road 153, most westerly boundary Range Road 183, most southerly boundary Township Road 545, and most northerly boundary Township Road 586 (see Attachment 5 - Lamont County Elementary Rural Attendance Boundaries). If the K-6 program were to be closed at Andrew School, only the elementary attendance area would be changed.

II. How the closure would affect the attendance at other schools

Currently there are 44 students registered for elementary school programming at Andrew for the 2023-24 school year (see Attachment 6 - 2023-24 Andrew K-6 Student Residence). These students could be re-designated to Lamont Elementary, Mundare Elementary/Junior High or A.L. Horton School. The addition of these students would have minimal impact on each school's overall enrolment and capacity.

- As of Sept. 29, 2022, Lamont Elementary had a student head count of 294 students. The total student capacity is 489 and the utilization rate is 62 per cent. Enrolment projections for Lamont Elementary indicate a slightly declining enrolment trend (see Attachment 7 - Lamont Elementary Enrolment).
- As of Sept. 29, 2022, AL Horton had a student head count of 352 students. The school has a net capacity of 453 students and a utilization rate of 80 per cent. Enrolment projections for A.L. Horton indicate a relatively stable enrolment trend (see Attachment 7 – A.L. Horton Enrolment).
- As of Sept. 29, 2022, Mundare had a student head count of 113 students. The school has a total capacity of 241 students and a utilization rate of 48 per cent. Enrolment projections for Mundare indicate a relatively stable enrolment trend (see Attachment 7 - Mundare Enrolment).

An additional consideration for Andrew students may be the following of junior high and high school siblings to a non-designated school.

III. Information on the Board's long-range capital plan

No capital projects are planned for Andrew School or Mundare. A.L. Horton/Vegreville Composite High is identified in the Three-Year Capital Plan which is Priority 3, and Priority 6 is a request for a Value scoping session for all of Lamont County schools.

Priority	School(s)	Sector	Year 1	Capacity	Cost (Millions)
1	Rudolph Hennig Junior High, Fort Saskatchewan High	3	<i>New School:</i> Replace Rudolph Hennig Junior High and Fort Saskatchewan High into one new facility on the Southridge site—result of the 2018 Fort Saskatchewan value scoping session	1,400 [^]	\$79.8
2	James Mowat Elementary	3	<i>New School:</i> Replace James Mowat Elementary on the Westpark site—result of the 2018 Fort Saskatchewan value scoping session	650	\$27.9
Priority	School(s)	Sector	Year 2	Capacity	Cost
3	A.L Horton Elementary, Vegreville Composite High	5	<i>Major Modernization:</i> Modernize and expand Vegreville Composite High to accommodate grades K-12 programming—result of the 2022 Vegreville value scoping session	765	\$48.3
4	Win Ferguson Elementary	3	<i>Major Modernization:</i> Modernize Win Ferguson Elementary—result of the 2018 Fort Saskatchewan value scoping session	470	\$21.3
5	Salisbury Composite High	1	<i>Major Modernization:</i> Modernize Salisbury Composite High—result of the 2020 Sherwood Park value scoping session	1,978	\$90
Priority	School(s)	Sector	Year 3	Capacity	Cost
6	Sector 4 value scoping session	4	<i>Engagement:</i> Conduct a Sector 4 value scoping session—planning funds only	TBD	n/a
7	Cambrian Crossing area	1	<i>New School:</i> Build a new school in Cambrian Crossing	950	n/a

[^]opening capacity—expandable to 1,600.

IV. The number of students who would need to be relocated as a result of the closure

Forty-four K-6 students, who have pre-registered would be relocated to either Lamont Elementary, Mundare School or A.L. Horton School. If the recommendation is approved, the returning student registration process will be re-opened to all families with children registered at Andrew School for the 2023-24 school year. This will allow the option to request a non-designated/school of choice instead of the newly designated school, with acceptance based on available space.



V. The need for, and extent of, busing

To accommodate transportation for re-designated students in grades K-6 at Andrew School, it was necessary to conduct a complete optimization of the Andrew attendance area. The optimization included all students residing in the Andrew attendance boundary including those who attend Lamont and Vegreville schools. Further, the optimization is reflective of the student enrolment for the 2023-24 school year and includes 100 students.

The optimization includes three proposed options. All three options have been created using the current fleet of six buses utilized to transport students grade K-12 residing in the Andrew attendance area to Andrew, Lamont, Mundare and Vegreville. The optimization does not reflect bus capacities nor consider student transportation funding allocations given the sparsity of the student population in this attendance area.

If the recommendation is approved, with all three options families will be afforded the opportunity to request a non-designated/school of choice instead of the designated school. As per [EIPS Policy 17: Student Transportation](#), busing may be made available, for a fee, to students who attend a school of choice instead of their designated school. Busing to a school of choice shall be offered to families provided there is no significant diversion from regular routing or increase in existing ride times. As per the approved [2023-24 Transportation Fee Schedule](#), busing to a school of choice is an enhanced service with an additional fee of \$100 per student.

Option “A” designates grade K-6 students residing in the current Andrew elementary attendance boundary to Mundare School. This option uses two buses to transport students to Lamont, two buses to Mundare, and two buses to Vegreville. The students attending Lamont and Mundare will have a direct ride to their respective schools while students attending Vegreville schools will transfer at Vegreville Composite High. In this option, the buses will need to travel an additional 454 kilometers a day at a cost of \$93,021 per year. This cost is based on the current contract agreement and the current cost of diesel fuel.

Current Average AM Ride Time	50 min	Option “A” Average AM Ride Time	52 min
Current Average PM Ride Time	49 min	Option “A” Average PM Ride Time	55 min
Current Longest AM Ride Time	115 min	Option “A” Longest AM Ride Time	113 min
Current Longest PM Ride Time	111 min	Option “A” Longest PM Ride Time	105 min



RECOMMENDATION REPORT

Andrew K-6 Student Only			
Current Average AM Ride Time	32 min	Option "A" Average AM Ride Time	55 min
Current Average PM Ride Time	31 min	Option "A" Average PM Ride Time	56 min
Current Longest AM Ride Time	75 min	Option "A" Longest AM Ride Time	113 min
Current Longest PM Ride Time	58 min	Option "A" Longest PM Ride Time	96 min

Option "B" designates grade K-6 students residing in the Village of Andrew to Mundare School. Students residing outside the Village of Andrew but inside the Andrew Elementary Boundary attendance area will follow the current Lamont Junior/Senior and Vegreville Junior/Senior attendance boundaries. This option uses two buses to transport students to Lamont, one bus to Mundare, and three buses to Vegreville. The students attending Mundare, and Lamont will have a direct ride to their respective schools while students attending Vegreville schools will transfer at Vegreville Composite High. In this option, the buses will need to travel an additional 201 kilometers a day at a cost of \$41,183 per year. This cost is based on the current contract agreement and the current cost of diesel fuel.

Current Average AM Ride Time	50 min	Option "B" Average AM Ride Time	49 min
Current Average PM Ride Time	49 min	Option "B" Average PM Ride Time	57 min
Current Longest AM Ride Time	115 min	Option "B" Longest AM Ride Time	80 min
Current Longest PM Ride Time	111 min	Option "B" Longest PM Ride Time	120 min

Andrew K-6 Student Only			
Current Average AM Ride Time	32 min	Option "B" Average AM Ride Time	48 min
Current Average PM Ride Time	31 min	Option "B" Average PM Ride Time	59 min
Current Longest AM Ride Time	75 min	Option "B" Longest AM Ride Time	93 min
Current Longest PM Ride Time	58 min	Option "B" Longest PM Ride Time	120 min



RECOMMENDATION REPORT

Option “C” designates grade K-6 students residing in the current Andrew Elementary Boundary to follow their older siblings to either the current Lamont Junior/Senior or Vegreville Junior/Senior attendance boundaries. This option uses three buses to transport students to Lamont and three buses to Vegreville. The students attending Lamont will have a direct ride to their respective schools while students attending Vegreville schools will transfer at Vegreville Composite High. In this option, the buses will need to travel an additional 238 kilometers a day at a cost of \$48,764 per year. This cost is based on the current contract agreement and the current cost of diesel fuel.

Current Average AM Ride Time	50 min	Option “C” Average AM Ride Time	50 min
Current Average PM Ride Time	49 min	Option “C” Average PM Ride Time	55 min
Current Longest AM Ride Time	115 min	Option “C” Longest AM Ride Time	80 min
Current Longest PM Ride Time	111 min	Option “C” Longest PM Ride Time	105 min

**Andrew K-6 Student Only			
Current Average AM Ride Time	32 min	Option “C” Average AM Ride Time	52 min
Current Average PM Ride Time	31 min	Option “C” Average PM Ride Time	55 min
Current Longest AM Ride Time	75 min	Option “C” Longest AM Ride Time	88 min
Current Longest PM Ride Time	58 min	Option “C” Longest PM Ride Time	79 min

With respect to busing, the cost, depending on the option chosen, would result in an increase of transportation costs ranging from \$41,183 to \$93,021 per year.

VI. Program implications for other schools and for the students when they are attending other schools

Currently, there are no system programs at Andrew School that would require accommodation at another school. Additionally, as all potential receiving schools have excess capacity, the addition of students from Andrew School would not cause accommodation challenges and could help support additional programming opportunities.

VII. The educational and financial impact of closing the school, including the effect on operational and capital implications

EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

If the closure of grades K-6 at Andrew School was approved, the programming with respect to classroom configurations would improve. More students in a grade are likely to reduce the need for triple grades in a

classroom and could result in combined or even single grade classrooms for instruction. Supports for Students will be available to provide assistance and develop a transition plan to help students move to their new school location if this occurs.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Andrew school is a small rural school and as such is funded by a block amount by Alberta Education based on a weighted moving average. If closed, the Division will not receive the block revenue grant for Andrew of \$481,770. The staffing and supply costs to Andrew School will no longer be incurred. Hence, there would be no financial implication to the Division. There would be a reallocation of those students to other EIPS schools. The Division's base funding would increase for the number of students that remain with EIPS and attend a non-blocked funded school. If all 44 students calculated for the spring enrolment remained for the 2023-24 school year other than in a block funded school, it would result in an increase in base funding by \$139,560.58. There is also the potential that some students may no longer remain with EIPS and therefore, the corresponding revenue would be lost. It is important to note that if the Andrew students are re-designated to Mundare School (a block funded school), the weighted moving average for Mundare will need to be recalculated to determine if its block funding group has increased.

As well, further revenue impacts with the closure of Andrew school would include the following:

- Loss of Operations and Maintenance funding for the 2023-24 school year is calculated to be \$170, 839.
- IMR funding would decrease slightly because the overall metres squared would change. The reduction in funding for the 2023-24 School year is calculated to be \$12,703.

However, with respect to the potential closure of Andrew School, expenditures will be reduced in Plant, Operations and Maintenance, and insurance, as the building will no longer be used by EIPS. Andrew School's operational and maintenance costs over the past two years have been:

	2021-22	2020-21
Water	5,584	4,939
Waste-other	1,223	-
Garbage	658	670
Natural Gas	23,451	12,573
Electricity	39,463	32,474
Insurance	7,393	12,130
Custodial	82,796	69,904
Snow Removal	1,829	1,800
Maintenance work orders	34,661	44,540
Total	197,056	179,035

Furthermore, if Andrew School was to close, EIPS would look to dispose of the asset as per the Closure of Schools and the Disposition of Property regulation. With respect to a potential closure of Andrew School, the Division has options related to the selling of the land and building, which all have financial implications:

1. EIPS owns both the building and the land, which is non-reserve land. As such, the Municipal Government Act does not apply and there is no legal obligation for the property to be transferred to the municipality. That means if Andrew School closes, the Division could offer to sell the property at market rate, in accordance with the *Education Act* and

- the Disposition of Property Regulation with the approval of the Minister.
2. The Division could also decide to transfer the building and the land to the municipality with the approval of the Minister.

Ultimately, if no entity wishes to retain the facility, EIPS may be responsible for demolition costs. Capital Project funding or school board reserves are the two sources for demolition of a closed school. Boards can include a stand-alone project on their Capital Plan, if there is a health and safety aspect that should be considered a priority for funding. Additionally, the current reciprocal use agreement in place with the Village of Andrew would indicate that there would be a cost share for the demolition, one-third of the cost borne by the Village, two-thirds by the school division. The total cost for demolition is estimated to be over \$400,000.

Until the asset is disposed of, there will continue to be some operation and maintenance costs incurred monthly such as minimum utilities and insurance.

As well, as per the funding manual, the proceeds on disposal of supported tangible and capital assets, must be credited to unspent deferred capital contributions, for investment in supported tangible capital assets. With respect to the possible closure of Andrew School, there will be no impact to the Division's bottom line as there is no gain/loss on disposal, as it is financially supported. The original Andrew building is fully amortized as is the storage shed. That means Net Book Value (NBV) = 0 (asset value less accumulated depreciation). The other assets, (playground, roofing and CCTV security system) still have a NBV but because the Division received external funding for these (playground through donations and roofing and equipment through IMR/CMR) when we dispose of these assets, there will not be a loss on the financial statements.

If the school was to close, costs for moving furniture and equipment to alternate schools would be estimated to be between \$40,000-50,000.

With respect to busing, the cost, depending on the option chosen, would result in an increase of transportation costs ranging from \$41,183 to \$93,021 per year.

VIII. The educational and financial impact if the school were to remain open.

EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

If the elementary programming were to remain at Andrew School, there would continue to be low enrolment numbers, which are not sustainable, especially in light of the small number of kindergarten students registered (3) for the upcoming year. Due to low enrolment, class configuration will require combined grades and staffing (both support and classified staff) as well as administration and counselling time will be significantly impacted. Equity of programming and opportunities for Andrew students will be an issue.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The financial impact to Andrew falls in to three broad areas:

- Firstly, Andrew Schools cost per student would remain the highest in the Division at \$16,682 (School Status Report, Jan. 19, 2023) versus the average EIPS student cost of \$7,141.
- The low student numbers at Andrew School affect funding for the school. As the province uses a weighted moving average (WMA) for funding, with a block grant for small schools, the WMA for Andrew school for 2023-24 will be 48.25, based on returning student registration numbers.

This in turn will move Andrew School, for funding purposes, from Group 3 to Group 2, which is a decrease from \$663,772 to \$481,770, or a net loss in revenue of \$182,002. An associated cut in staffing would need to occur.

- The building is at the end of life and without a significant investment (approximately \$3,292,900) in infrastructure by both EIPS and the Village of Andrew, the building will not be occupiable in the immediate future.
 - An estimate to replace the sprinkler system in its entirety has been provided at a cost of \$1,020,000, not including contingency, asbestos abatement, or GST.
 - The cost to replace the steel roof in its entirety with ventilation and membrane upgrades is \$2,272,900 not including contingency, asbestos abatement, or GST.
- Andrew School's operational and maintenance costs over the past few years have been \$197,056 in 2021-22 and \$179,035 in 2020-21. Ongoing costs similar to what has been reported would be incurred yearly. These ongoing costs would be offset by the continued funding from the province of:
 - Operations and Maintenance funding for the 2023-24 school year is calculated to be \$170,839.
 - IMR funding calculated based on Andrew School square area would continue for the 2023-24 School year to include \$12,703.

COMMUNICATION PLAN

If approved, EIPS will notify the Minister in writing of the decision of the Board, and will inform parents, staff and stakeholders in regard to the process and next steps to be completed.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. [Board Policy 15: School Closure and Program Reduction](#)
2. *Education Act*, Section 62, Closure of schools
3. Andrew School Population History
4. Census Population Change Data
5. Lamont County Elementary, Junior and Senior High Rural Attendance Boundaries
6. Scatter Plot Map: 2023-24 Andrew K-6 Student Residence
7. Lamont Elementary, A.L Horton and Mundare Enrolment
8. Andrew School Community Meeting: April 25, 2023

Policy 15

SCHOOL CLOSURE AND PROGRAM REDUCTION

The Board of Trustees recognizes that due to changes in enrolment, shifts in demographics, or fiscal constraints, it may be necessary to close a school or modify the programs offered in a school or schools under its jurisdiction.

Specifically

1. The authority of the Board is derived from and must comply with section 62 of the *Education Act* and the Disposition of Property Regulation, which provides that a board may, only by resolution, permanently or temporarily:
 1. close a school; or
 2. transfer students from one school building to another school building.
2. The Board may review school programs and school operations to determine the future of such schools when:
 1. the Board believes such a review will improve the availability of programs or efficiency of operations;
 2. the school determines enrolments and consequent funding threaten the viability of the school program;
 3. operating/maintenance/renovation/transportation costs place excessive demands on the Division's budget; or
 4. recommended by the Superintendent.
3. Where the Board is considering the closure of a school, or transfer of students from one school building to another school building, the Board shall:
 1. notify in writing the parents of every student enrolled in the school that may be affected; and
 2. notify in writing any other person, municipality or community organization who may be significantly affected.
4. For the purpose of school closure only, the Board shall:
 1. provide adequate opportunity for the public to respond to the Board's proposal to close the school;
 2. establish a process for the Board to consider public feedback; and
 3. request of administration a report which shall be presented at a public board meeting which sets out the following:
 1. how the closure would affect the attendance area defined for that school;
 2. how the closure would affect the attendance at other schools;
 3. information on the Board's long-range capital plan;
 4. the number of students who would need to be relocated as a result of the closure;
 5. the need for, and extent of, busing;
 6. program implications for other schools and for the students when they are attending other schools;
 7. the educational and financial impact of closing the school, including the effect on operational costs and capital implications; and

8. the educational and financial impact if the school were to remain open.
5. The Board shall use the following process and criteria to determine whether it has use for a school building that has been closed:
 1. The Board shall direct the administration to prepare a recommendation report that shall contain the following contents:
 1. a review of demographic factors relating to the school in the context of the overall Division;
 2. the length of time that the school building has been closed;
 3. consideration of the potential for other public educational uses for the school building, and the estimated cost;
 4. consideration of the potential for other levels of government or private entities to take ownership and operate the building for the public good; and
 5. any other criteria or issues that the administration considers relevant to the Board's decision.
6. When, in the opinion of the Minister, space is available in a school building, the Minister may direct the Board to make space available to another board.
7. The Board shall use the following process and criteria to determine, for the purposes of the *Municipal Government Act*, whether its interest in school reserve, municipal and school reserve, or municipal reserve is surplus to the Board's needs:
 1. The Board shall direct the administration to prepare a recommendation report that shall contain the following contents:
 1. review of enrolment trends within the area intended to be served by the school reserve, municipal and school reserve or municipal reserve;
 2. consideration of student accommodation and transportation issues;
 3. whether a school on the school reserve, municipal and school reserve or municipal reserve is included in the Board's capital plan;
 4. the length of time the school reserve, municipal and school reserve or municipal reserve has existed and has not been needed by the Board;
 5. a summary of the consultation, if any, with other boards with respect to their needs for the school reserve, municipal and school reserve or municipal reserve; and
 6. any other criteria or issues that the administration considers relevant to the Board's decision.

Reference:

Sections 11, 33, 53, 62, 192, 194, 222, 248, 249 *Education Act*

Last reviewed:	Last updated:
Dec. 14, 2015	Feb. 18, 2016
March 6, 2017	April 20, 2017

Jan. 25, 2018

Jan. 25, 2018

Jan. 29, 2019

Feb. 21, 2019

Dec. 10, 2019

Dec. 19, 2019

Dec. 8, 2020

Feb. 8, 2022

(b) receive payment, as determined by the board, for providing that service.

(2) A board is not under any liability to the parent of a student or to a student for negligence arising out of the student's being conveyed to and from school or the bus route pursuant to an agreement made under this section.

2019 c7 s16

School day and year

60 A board shall determine and make publicly available for each school year the days, dates and number of days of school operation.

Flags

61 A board shall ensure that the Canadian flag and the Alberta flag are displayed at each school operated by the board.

Closure of schools

62(1) A board may, only by resolution, permanently or temporarily

- (a) close a school, or
- (b) transfer students from one school building to another school building.

(2) A board shall establish, implement and make publicly available policies respecting the actions referred to in subsection (1).

(3) A policy established pursuant to subsection (2) must be consistent with any regulations made by the Minister under this section.

(4) Where a board is considering an action referred to in subsection (1), the board shall, in writing, notify

- (a) the parents of every student enrolled in the school that may be affected by the action considered under subsection (1), and
- (b) any other person, municipality or community organization who, in the opinion of the board, may be significantly affected.

(5) A policy established pursuant to subsection (2) related to the permanent closure of a school must provide for

- (a) adequate opportunity for the public to respond to the board's proposal to permanently close a school,
 - (b) a process by which the board shall fairly consider responses provided under clause (a),
 - (c) consideration of future growth or decline in student enrolment, and
 - (d) consideration of possible alternative educational or community uses for all or part of the school building.
- (6) Where a board decides to close a school permanently, the board shall notify the Minister in writing forthwith and include
- (a) the name of the school, and
 - (b) the effective date of the closure.
- (7) This section does not apply where the Minister directs a board to dispose of a school building pursuant to section 192.
- (8) The Minister may make regulations with respect to the permanent or temporary closure of schools by a board.

Education services agreements for First Nations students

- 63(1)** In this section, "Indian" means Indian as defined in the *Indian Act* (Canada).
- (2) The Minister may, by order, establish requirements or standards that apply to education services agreements between a board and
- (a) the Government of Canada or an agent of the Government of Canada, or
 - (b) a council of a band as defined in the *Indian Act* (Canada) or a person authorized by the council of a band,
- for the education of Indian children.
- (3) Where a board enters into an agreement with respect to the education of Indian children pursuant to subsection (2), the agreement must meet the requirements or standards established by the Minister.
- (4) The *Regulations Act* does not apply to an order made under subsection (2).

2012 cE-0.3 s63;2015 c6 s13

A History of the Number of Children in this Catchment

Age	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
1 to 4	35	35	40	30	30	25	30	45	40	40	40	30
5 to 8	40	35	35	35	40	43	53	40	40	30	40	48
9 to 12	35	35	35	35	35	35	30	30	35	48	55	40
13 to 16	40	38	38	38	35	35	40	38	35	30	35	40
1 to 16	150	143	148	138	140	138	153	153	150	148	170	158

A "Catchment" is that geographic area which represents the formal attendance boundary of a school.

Profile table

[Feedback](#)
[Note: Gender](#)
[Download](#)
[▶ Add a geography](#)
[▶ Add or remove data](#)

Characteristic	Andrew, Village (VL) ⓘ Alberta [Census subdivision]		
	Counts		
	Total	Men +	Women +
Population and dwellings			
Population, 2021 ¹	366	...	...
Population, 2016 ¹	425	...	...
Population percentage change, 2016 to 2021	- 13.9	...	...
Total private dwellings ²	238	...	...
Private dwellings occupied by usual residents ³	192	...	...
Population density per square kilometre	310.1	...	...
Land area in square kilometres	1.18	...	...
Age characteristics			

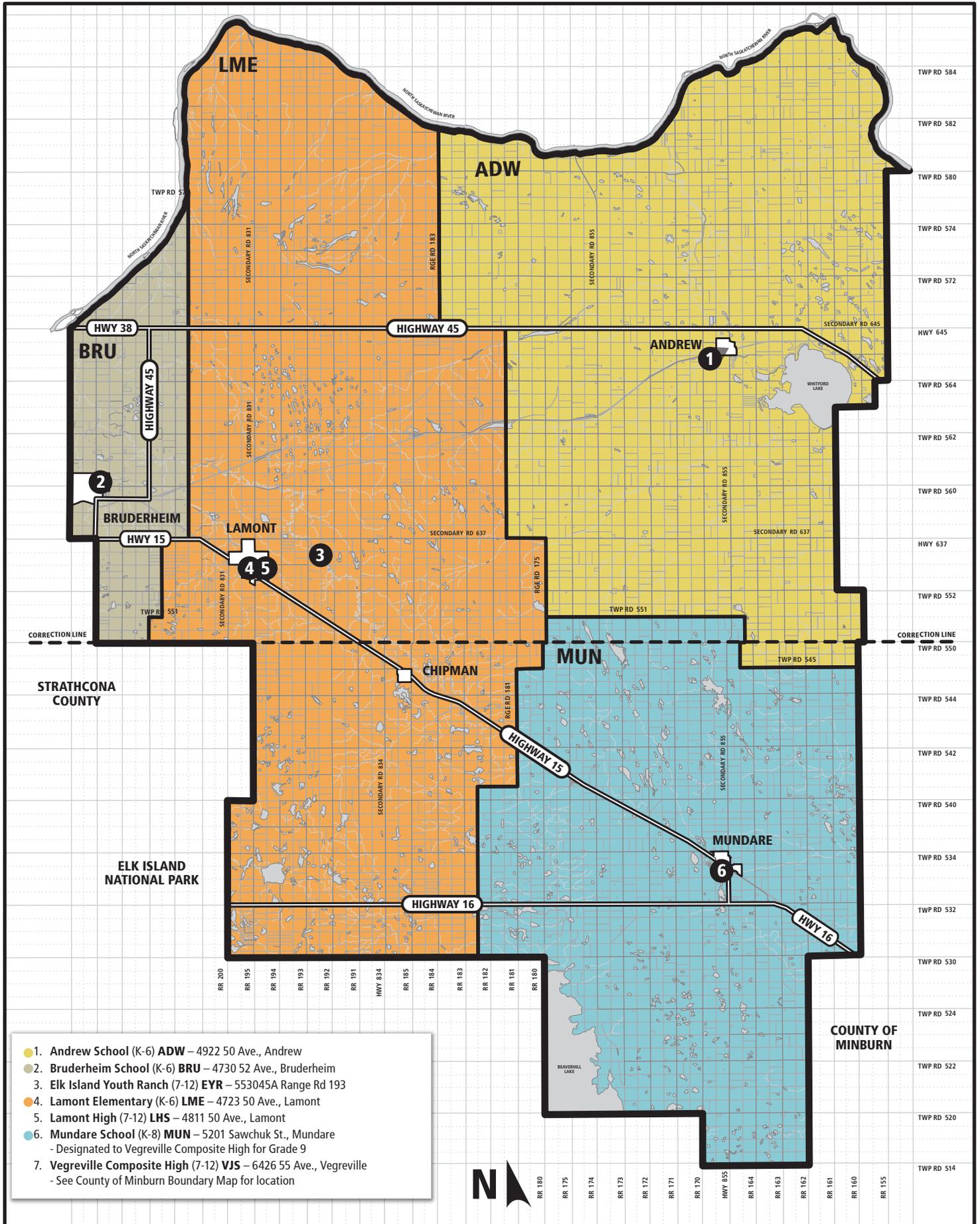
Statistics Canada. 2023. (table). *Census Profile*. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released February 8, 2023.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed March 15, 2023).



Lamont County ELEMENTARY ATTENDANCE BOUNDARIES

Updated March 10, 2023



- 1. Andrew School (K-6) **ADW** – 4922 50 Ave., Andrew
- 2. Bruderheim School (K-6) **BRU** – 4730 52 Ave., Bruderheim
- 3. Elk Island Youth Ranch (7-12) **EYR** – 553045A Range Rd 193
- 4. Lamont Elementary (K-6) **LME** – 4723 50 Ave., Lamont
- 5. Lamont High (7-12) **LHS** – 4811 50 Ave., Lamont
- 6. Mundare School (K-8) **MUN** – 5201 Sawchuk St., Mundare
- Designated to Vegreville Composite High for Grade 9
- 7. Vegreville Composite High (7-12) **VJS** – 6426 55 Ave., Vegreville
- See County of Minburn Boundary Map for location



RR 180 RR 175 RR 174 RR 173 RR 172 RR 171 RR 170 HWY 855 RR 164 RR 163 RR 162 RR 161 RR 160 RR 155

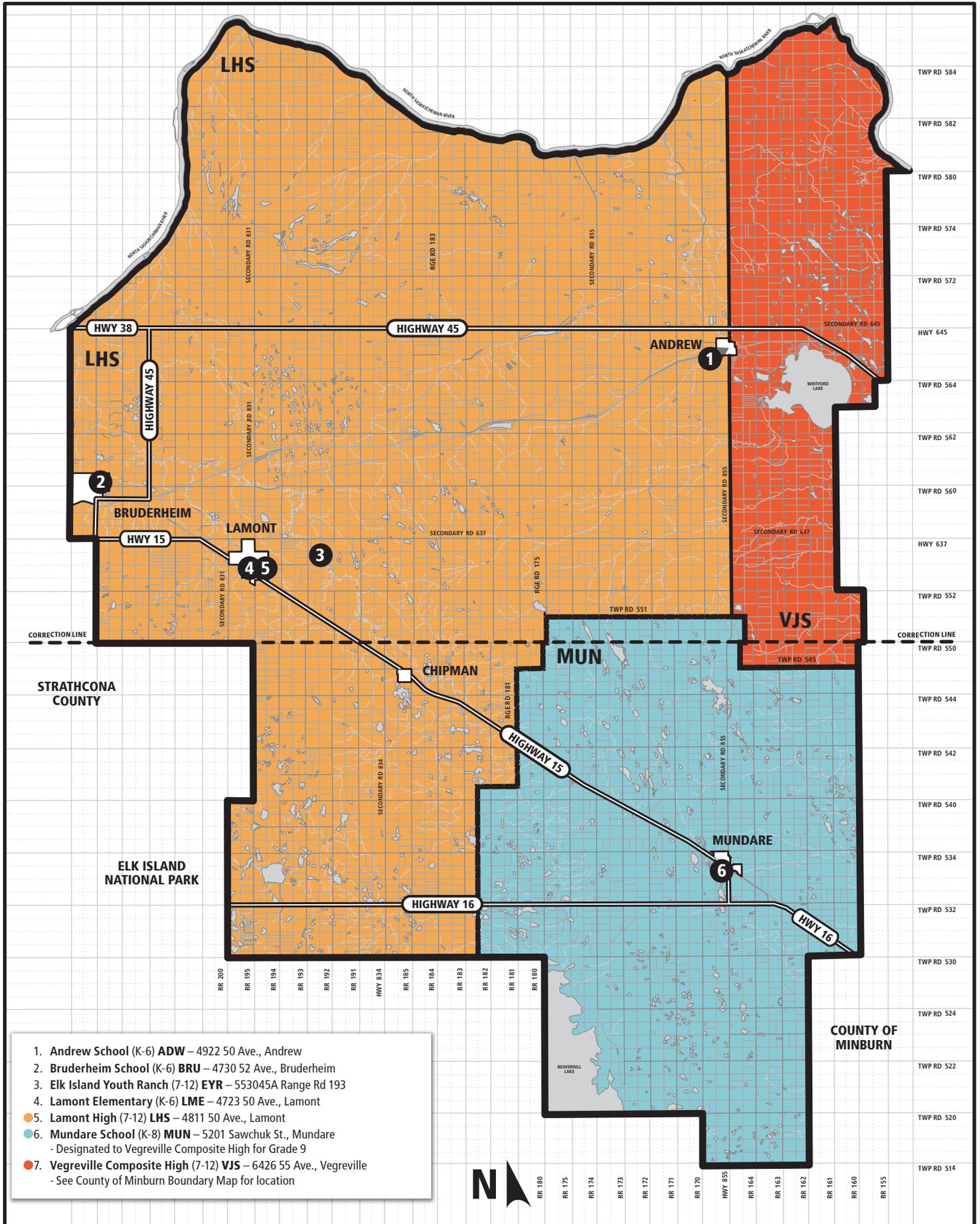
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TWP RD 582
TWP RD 580
TWP RD 574
TWP RD 572
HWY 645
TWP RD 564
TWP RD 562
TWP RD 560
HWY 637
TWP RD 552
CORRECTION LINE
TWP RD 550
TWP RD 544
TWP RD 542
TWP RD 540
TWP RD 534
TWP RD 532
TWP RD 530
TWP RD 524
TWP RD 522
TWP RD 520
TWP RD 514



Junior High Attendance Boundaries

LAMONT COUNTY

Updated March 10, 2023



1. Andrew School (K-6) **ADW** – 4922 50 Ave., Andrew
2. Bruderheim School (K-6) **BRU** – 4730 52 Ave., Bruderheim
3. Elk Island Youth Ranch (7-12) **EYR** – 553045A Range Rd 193
4. Lamont Elementary (K-6) **LME** – 4723 50 Ave., Lamont
5. Lamont High (7-12) **LHS** – 4811 50 Ave., Lamont
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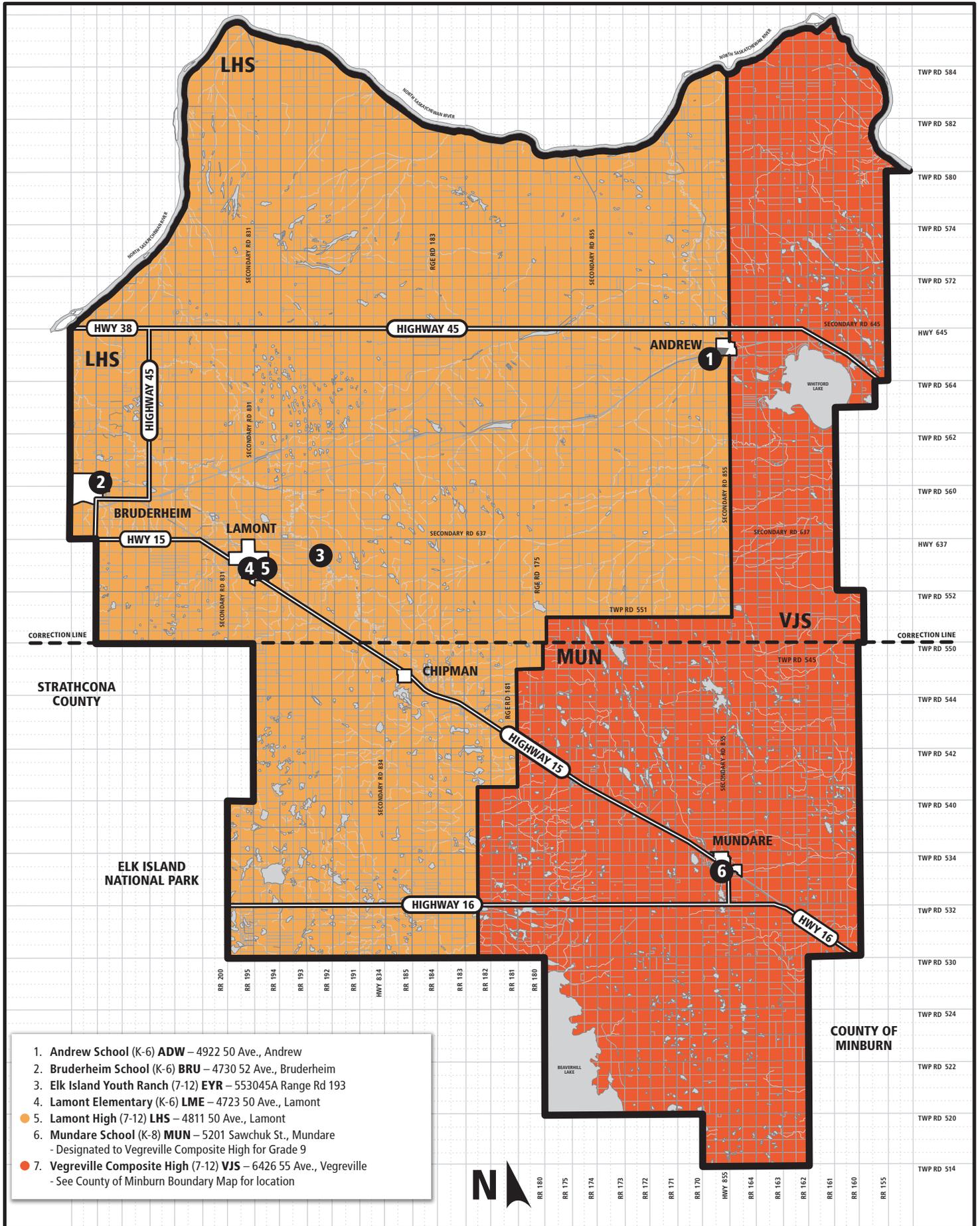
RR 200 RR 195 RR 194 RR 193 RR 192 RR 191 HWY 834 RR 185 RR 184 RR 183 RR 182 RR 181 RR 180
 RR 180 RR 175 RR 174 RR 173 RR 172 RR 171 RR 170 HWY 855 RR 164 RR 163 RR 162 RR 161 RR 160 RR 155

TWP RD 584
 TWP RD 582
 TWP RD 580
 TWP RD 574
 TWP RD 572
 HWY 645
 TWP RD 564
 TWP RD 562
 TWP RD 560
 HWY 637
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 TWP RD 524
 TWP RD 522
 TWP RD 520
 TWP RD 514



Senior High Attendance Boundaries LAMONT COUNTY

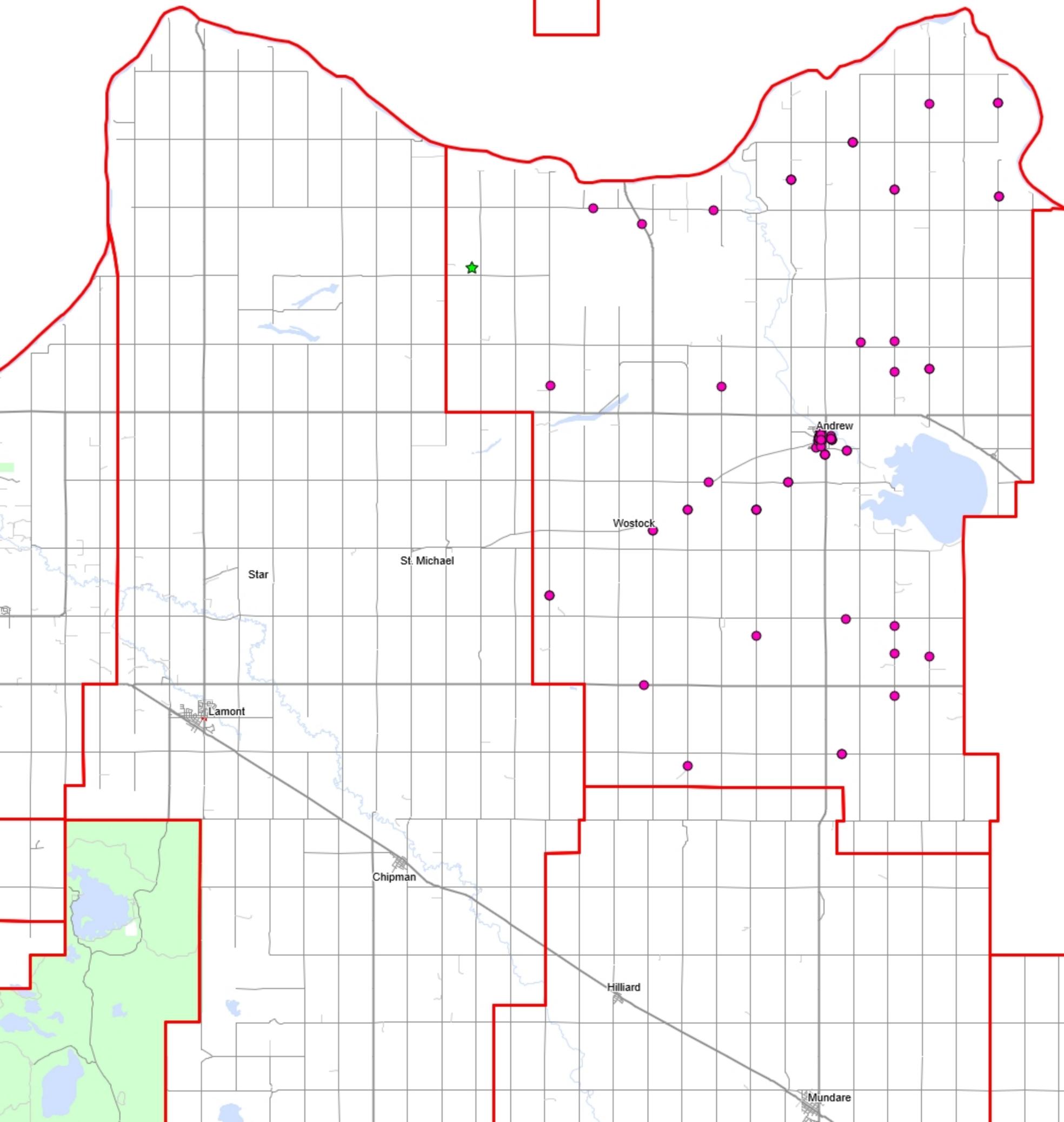
Updated March 10, 2023



- 1. Andrew School (K-6) **ADW** – 4922 50 Ave., Andrew
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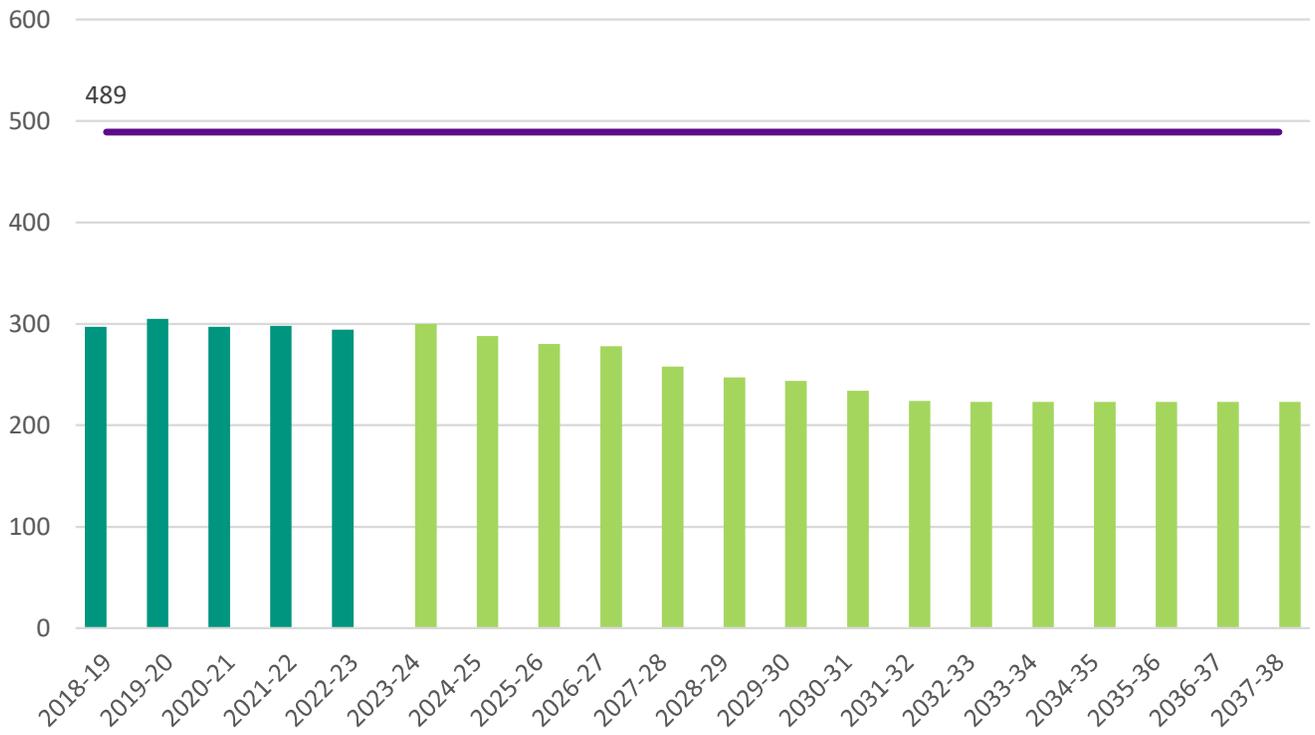
Aspen View R.D.



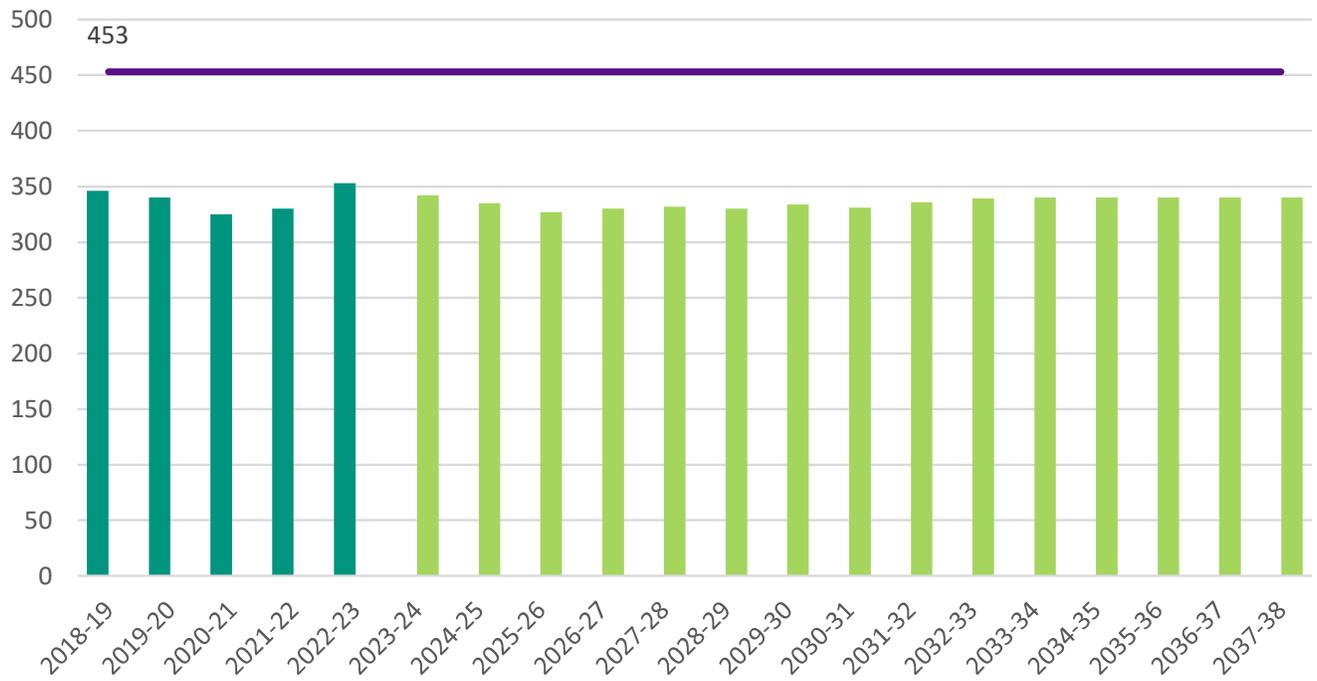
St. Paul Education R.D.



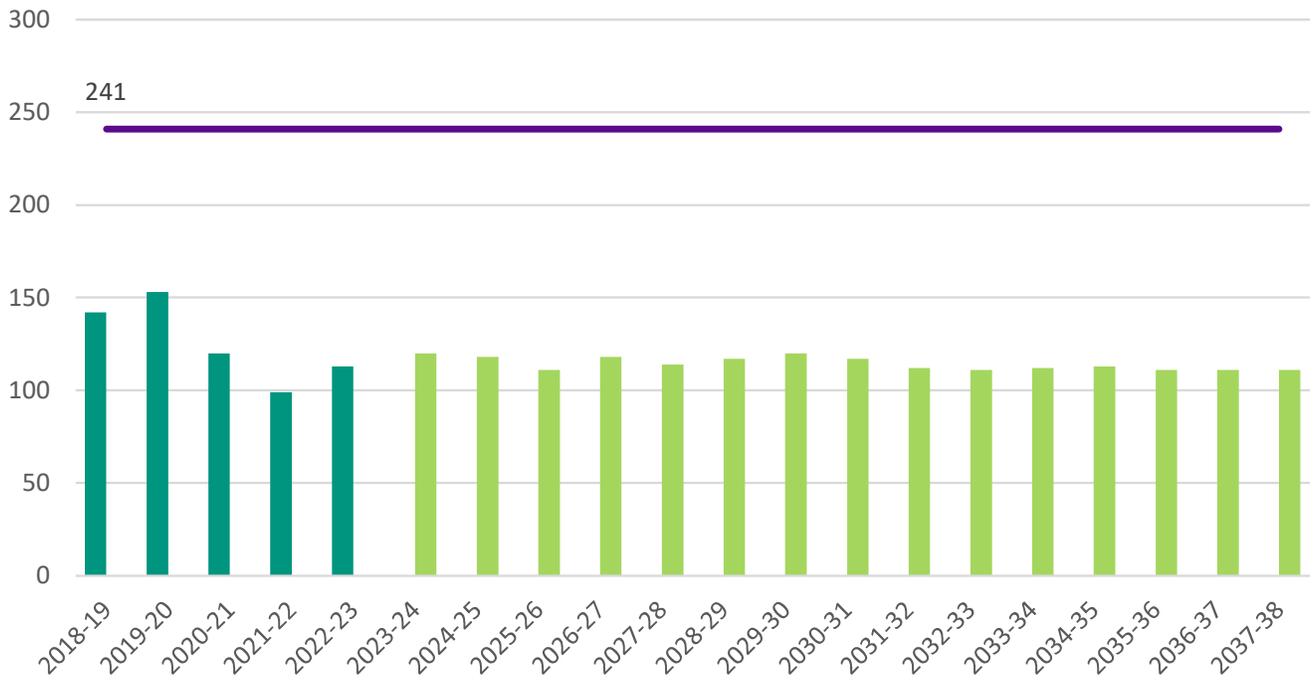
Lamont Elementary (Head Count)



A. L. Horton Elementary (Head cout)



Mundare School (Head Count)



ANDREW SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEETING: APRIL 25, 2023

SUMMARY

Overview

Elk Island Public Schools (EIPS) invited parents and community members to take part in a conversation on April 25, 2023, regarding the potential closure of Andrew School.

Division Principal Dave Antymniuk shared the agenda for the meeting and encouraged attendees to provide feedback to the Division using the QR codes posted on site or to visit www.eips.ca and follow the link to the Andrew School Community Meeting page to access the feedback form. Division Principal Antymniuk then introduced those present at the meeting from EIPS:

- EIPS Board of Trustees Chair Trina Boymook; Trustee Randy Footz; Trustee Jim Seutter; Trustee Don Irwin; Trustee Susan Miller; and Trustee Cathy Allen. Trustee Colleen Holowaychuk was absent from the meeting due to a death in the family.
- From administration, Superintendent Mark Liguori; Associate Superintendent—Human Resources, Brent Billey; Associate Superintendent—Supports for Students, Sandra Stoddard; Division Principal Dave Antymniuk; Secretary Treasurer Candace Cole; Lisa Weder, Director of Student Transportation; Calvin Wait, Director of Facility Services; Laura McNabb, Director of Communication Services; Brent Dragon, Assistant Director, Planning; Stephanie Krause, Senior Planner, Student Transportation; and Principal Kelly Sawatzky.

First, Superintendent Liguori revisited the issues previously discussed in regard to both the fire suppression system and the roof—that emerged as the result of four phases of construction undertaken between 1957 and 1991.

The fire suppression system originally installed was a dry system; that is, it wasn't designed with pipes to hold water in reserve. Unfortunately, at some point the system was charged with water and as a result, pipes have corroded, leaked and it has led to incidents of flooding. The Division has replaced portions of the system over time, but an entire replacement is required. Should the system fail, the building could no longer be occupied.

Problems with the roof have also contributed to the deterioration of the fire suppression system, and the system cannot be replaced without also addressing the condition of the building envelope. The slope of the roof, as well as a lack of insulation between old and newer portions of the structure, means ice dams will continue to form in the winter as warm air rises, snow melts, and then refreezes.

In order to get an estimate for repairs of both systems, EIPS placed a post on Alberta Purchasing Connection in order to prequalify General Contractors. Once that process was complete, there were six general contractors who met the pre-qualifications. Packages with details about the project were sent to all six general contractors. Of those that received packages, only two contractors submitted bids. The estimated cost of the repairs—not including contingency costs, asbestos abatement or GST—came in at approximately \$3.3 million.

While the fire suppression system currently remains operational, its failure is imminent, and the building cannot be occupied once the system can no longer be certified.

Second, Superintendent Liguori talked about the low enrolment at Andrew School. While the school used to receive funding based on a per-pupil allocation, the Government of Alberta moved to a Weighted Moving Average model three years ago. This means schools are funded for students who attend but not all dollars are received up front. In the first year, schools receive, 50 per cent funding; 30 per cent in the second year; and 20 per cent in the third year. There also used to be a Small School by Necessity grant that provided block funding to small schools which made it possible for them to continue operating. When that funding model changed to WMA, the government also changed how it block-funded small schools. Depending on the tier of funding, as population declined, dollars declined as well. School boards were then left with having to make some very difficult decisions about the viability of small schools. More than ever, the numbers of students became critical in keeping small schools operational.

In Andrew, there has been a consistent decline over time. As a result of the decline noted for the upcoming school year, the funding level in Andrew has dropped from \$663K to \$482K. Unfortunately, that means there are just not enough students attending Andrew School for the Division to provide high quality, equitable education for the remaining students.

The low student numbers at Andrew School equate to a small teaching and support staff, and two or three combined classes. The early years are the most important for students, and they need more time and teaching than this grade alignment could provide. Although years ago one-room schools were able to serve small communities, the Superintendent knows it is no longer possible to offer a high quality education for any of those students in those conditions.

EIPS' first obligation is to ensure equity of education for students regardless of where they live in the Division. For that reason, we are recommending students from Andrew be designated to Mundare School, which is a relatively new facility and has the capacity to accommodate them.

Because of these two reasons—facility condition and low enrolment—the superintendent will be recommending a closure and asking the Board to move students to other schools. He feels ultimately, it is in the best educational interest of students. No decision has been made, though, and the Board of Trustees will debate the recommendation vigorously.

Key themes

COMMON QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Q: Has EIPS considered asking Alberta Education for funds to address the condition issues at Andrew School?

A: In dealing with recent infrastructure issues at other schools, the Government of Alberta has advised EIPS that school divisions are provided Infrastructure Maintenance and Renewal (IMR) and Capital Maintenance and Renewal (CMR) dollars, and must use either those or existing capital reserve funds for emergent repairs.

The superintendent and senior administrators have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure allocations to the Dollars in division be spent in the best way possible, to the maximum benefit of the greatest number of students.

Q: Could EIPS request that Alberta Education undertake a major renovation or build a new school in Andrew?

A: Due to the proximity of Mundare School, a facility that opened in 2015, and the fact that Mundare School is only at 40 per cent enrolment, Alberta Education would not consider funding a major renovation or new school for Andrew.

Q: Could EIPS just bring in some modular classrooms that are in good repair, and keep students at Andrew School?

A: Modular classrooms are prioritized for schools that have exceeded or are close to exceeding capacity.

Q: Has the Board considered the decline in student enrolment may be due to the previous closures of both the junior and senior high schools in Andrew, and the uncertainty about the future of the elementary school?

A: We can't speculate as to the reasons for a decline in enrolment but do know a declining population in the Andrew area is a contributing factor.

Q: How long do principals and teachers stay at Andrew? There has been significant turnover and it's difficult for students to forge positive relationships with educators when they only stay for a few years. Perhaps that also impacted enrolment.

A: Principals and teachers are employed by the Division and not of the school itself; often, if they are not local to the area, they seek growth opportunities at other schools. EIPS cannot indenture employees to a specific school.

Q: Quite a few high school students didn't want to move and weren't happy after the fact. For a lot of those kids, attending post-secondary was never in the cards for them.

A: Moving students wasn't about pushing them towards post-secondary, but it was about ensuring they had a chance to excel academically and to open every single door to future success that we could for them. As an educational institution, that is our job.

Q: If students are already attending a non-designated school, how will the possible designation to Mundare Elementary impact student transportation? Currently, those who send their children to a school other than Andrew have to pay the non-designated fee. If the Board decides to designate students to Mundare Elementary, parents shouldn't have to pay to continue sending their children to another school like Lamont Elementary or A.L. Horton Elementary.

A: Part of what the Board will decide, should the motion to close the school be passed, is where students will be designated and how student transportation will be configured.

Q: Ride times are already very long; the report says those could increase even further. Those times are very long for elementary students. Why doesn't the Division allocate additional buses to bring ride times down?

A: Right now, the Division supplements the two buses that are funded through Student Transportation resources with four additional buses. EIPS does everything it can to reduce ride times, but the Andrew School catchment area is very large and long rides times are sometimes inevitable. Everything in the report provided to the Board of Trustees is based on averages and estimates. Should a decision be made to close the school, Student Transportation will work on routes to keep ride times as low as is feasible.

Q: Why does EIPS allow families to send their children to schools outside of Andrew? Why are we busing students out of community when our numbers are so low here? Who approves them leaving the schools?

A: The *Education Act* states that if a family wants their child to attend another school within the Division, and there are resources and space at the school in which they want to enrol their child, then Division must accommodate that request. It's also a philosophical practice to allow "School of Choice" in our Division, except in areas with closed boundaries where schools are at capacity.

Q: There are many families within the Andrew catchment area with children who are not yet school age, but there is a lack of communication about Andrew School and kindergarten registration. What could our future enrolment numbers be if EIPS sent them letters and got in touch with them?

A: Communication Services undertakes an annual comprehensive awareness campaign about kindergarten registration in every community it serves. This includes targeted advertising in small local newspapers, on the radio, on Twitter and Facebook, and online. EIPS has no way of identifying or directly contacting families who have not already enrolled in the Division.

Q: What was enrolment at the elementary level before the junior high and senior high programs were relocated?

A: In 2018-19 when Andrew was a K-12 school, the elementary enrolment total was 67. Kindergarten to Grade 6 enrolment has remained under 100 in Andrew since 2005.

Q: We pay school taxes in our area, so why aren't our taxes used to address the problems in Andrew?

A: Taxes aren't designated by area; they are pooled by the Government of Alberta and allocated according to their own funding formulas.

Q: Will parents have the choice as to where kids go? Having my child attend school in Mundare, which starts later in the day and runs later, will cause issues for me around work and childcare.

A: The Board of Trustees will make a decision about designated and non-designated schools, should the motion to close Andrew School pass.

Q: Why doesn't the Division pull students from other schools to raise enrolment in Andrew?

A: If boundaries were changed and more students designated to Andrew rather than Mundare, then Mundare would be facing the same enrolment situation as Andrew School. Mundare Elementary, however, does not have the same infrastructure challenges as Andrew.

Q: Why doesn't the Division give families in schools that have higher enrolment the option of attending Andrew School instead, thereby evening out class sizes and enrolment in both locations?

A: It is highly unlikely parents in larger centres would want to transport students that far outside their designated boundaries. However, the Division's practice of allowing families school of choice doesn't prevent them from doing so.

Q: Would EIPS allow students to attend a school division outside of the boundary? For example, maybe Andrew Elementary students who live closer to Smoky Lake could attend an Aspen View School Division school.

A: Parents and students currently have the option of attending any school, or enrolling with any school division, provided there is space and resources at that school to accommodate students.

Q: Have the Andrew School boundaries been changed in the last twenty years for buses?

A: No.

Q: If Andrew School closed, could the facility be offered to the Village of Andrew for a nominal fee?

A: If a school closes, the Division has a process it must follow. The Minister of Education would first ask if there is another school or division that wants it. If there is interest, there is a disposition of property regulation that is followed. Typically, the asset is transferred for "fee simple." EIPS owns all the land and its portion of building, and the Village of Andrew has a 99-year lease for their portion of the building on the land. This has to do with the transfer of land done in 1994. It may be possible but it's not a simple process—all parties would have to agree to it. If the fire suppression system fails, the Village would be on the hook for \$3 million or more.

Q: Has the school division considered a specialized school or other way to change programming to attract students from further away?

A: Yes, we looked at a variety of options when the closures of the junior and senior high were being considered. At this point in time, however, the facility condition may impede those considerations.

Q: How do we, as people from Andrew, confirm that the Board of Trustees is accountable to us? That we have had people trying to make the school successful?

A: Locally elected trustee Colleen Holowaychuk is from this area, graduated from Andrew, and has spoken passionately about rural education and the value in the community. The Board represents a geographically diverse area and faces challenges in each area we serve. At the end of the day, the Board takes seriously all the decisions they make – which are made for all 17,400 students. They have a responsibility to consider the larger picture.

Q: If the school closes down, what happens to all those items for which parents raised money over the years—the library, fitness centre, Chromebooks and so on?

A: Items purchased by school council are the property of the school or the school division—not the parents or students. Having said that, the Board will wrestle with a number of decisions including transportation, fees, and the disposition of items. When the Board goes through process, it may choose to retire specific assets but would have to work with secretary treasurer to ensure regulations are followed.

Q: What about the playground? Will it be removed? .

A: The disposition of the playground and structures would be decided by the Board.

Q: Maybe the Village of Andrew could put out a tender and get a better price for the repairs that have to be made.

A: The estimates we received came from prequalified contractors; it's highly unlikely that with the increase in prices and limited capacity of contractors, prices will have dropped.

Q: Can parents undertake fundraising to help pay for repairs? Can we volunteer to work on the building and find our own contractors?

A: The Division must abide by the New West Trade Partnership Agreement, which has prohibitions against those actions. Even if parents undertook fundraising, the Division would still have to go out to tender through APC.

Q: What will happen to all the historical artifacts and items within the school? Would we be allowed to have them displayed in the Village museum? There was a school in Fort Saskatchewan where those items were thrown away.

A: Administration can't speak for decisions which remain the purview of the Board of Trustees, but for Wye School a number of artifacts were given to the local museum for retention and display.

Q: At the September meeting, the superintendent said the Division has spent \$663K to do temporary fixes since 2015. The roof has leaked long before that. Why weren't dollars allocated earlier than now?

A: There was money spent on repairs before then; that \$663K total is just within recent history. EIPS has been trying to remediate the issues beforehand. The problems stem from the actual design of the roof that was incorrect from the beginning. Since taking over the building we've undertaken ongoing fixes but it's beyond simple repairs now.

Q: Why wasn't asbestos remediation part of the bid process?

A: Until the contractors actually deconstruct the roof, they cannot provide an estimate of how much it will cost.

Q: How was the addition of the school done without proper inspection before children began attending this school? Who signed off on it? Who should be held accountable?

A: EIPS did not have possession of the school before 1995; the addition was undertaken by Lamont County, who ran their own school division.

Q: What makes a school "investment worthy?" Even if the roof and fire suppression system was fixed, how long until something else is no longer safe within the school building?

A: Inspections undertaken in Andrew School last year provided us a maintenance estimate of \$2.1 million over the next five years—outside of the cost of repairing both the roof and fire suppression systems.

Q: Could just a small portion of the building be demolished, and the rest continue to be used with no issue?

A: No, as 80 per cent of the roof currently leaks.

Q: When will you make a decision on Andrew? The village would only have 90 days to come up with a place for the library, rec centre, council chambers, archives, and so on, and figure out a plan to finance it.

A: If the Board of Trustees votes to close the school, EIPS administration would meet with the council and discuss what comes next. There would be a conversation, notwithstanding what the Minister of Education may wish to do with the school.

Q: Could current Andrew Staff all be moved to Mundare Elementary, if that is where students are redesignated, in order to provide consistency for the children?

A: Permanent staff with continuous contracts can apply on any available job within the Division; some may wish to go to Mundare and some may wish to work elsewhere. Employees under the collective agreement have the right to choose where they work.

CONCLUSION:

Superintendent Liguori indicated the Board will consider this decision next week—on May 4. Once a decision is made, information will be shared with school families, the village and the county.

If community members wish to speak to the Board at that meeting, they must contact [Candace Cole](#), Secretary Treasurer by noon the day before the meeting. Superintendent Liguori thanked attendees for being respectful, honest and willing to voice their opinions.