

## ASD West BATH COMMUNITY SCHOOL: Grade Reconfiguration Review

April 2021

### **Purpose:**

A grade reconfiguration review was conducted of Bath Community School during the time frame of March 15-April 9, 2021. *The purpose of this review was to make a recommendation whether Bath Community School remain as a K-8 school or whether it should revert to a K-5 school, with students in 6-8 moving to Florenceville Middle School.*

### **Scope of Consult:**

Many stakeholders were invited to consultation during this review. They include:

- 1) All students grades 5-8 at Bath Community School (in person small focus groups)
- 2) All students in grades 9-12 who had previously attended Bath Community School and currently attend Carleton North High School (in person groups, online, and exit surveys)
- 3) All staff at Bath Community School (in person individual and paper questionnaires)
- 4) All parents at Bath Community School (email, texts, and online survey)
- 5) Principals of Florenceville Middle School and Carleton North High School (in person)
- 6) Community stakeholders—municipal, provincial, and school governance (phone and virtual meetings)

District staff were consulted to obtain information about programming, system assessment data, facilities, bussing, etc.

### **Methods:**

Feedback and input from staff, parents, and community members was recorded through paper questionnaires, online questionnaires, or notes from in person, phone, or virtual conversations.

Feedback from students was recorded via notes from in person meetings. High school virtual meetings were recorded. All students had an opportunity to submit anonymous exit slips.

The questionnaire provided the script for all questions and included a chart format to be filled out with the following: 1) Current Bath Community School: Benefits/Drawbacks 2) Florenceville Middle School: Benefits/Drawbacks 3) Preference: BCS, FMS, No preference

### **Participation response:**

Grades 5-8 students: 50 in person

Grades 9-12: Approximately 80 students in person, 32 exit slips

Bath Community School Staff: 13 questionnaires and 10 in person meetings

Families: 11

Other community stakeholders: 7

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### Findings:

The engagement process began with the current grade 5-8 students of Bath Community School as they are central stakeholders in this review. Next, the staff of BCS were invited over a series of days to sit with me and share their thoughts. Engagement with other stakeholders continued for approximately three weeks in total.

The following represents the summarized themes that emerged during the course of this review:

#### 1) Connectedness and relationship

There was an overwhelming majority of stakeholders that indicated the level of connectedness and relationship is highly effective within the current K-8 configuration. Current and former students almost unanimously detailed an environment of purposeful relationship with teachers as well as fellow students.

This is confirmed by the most recent (2019-2020) OurSCHOOL data which indicates the school outperforms the provincial average in the following relevant categories: Advocacy at school, Feel safe attending this school, Students with positive behavior at school, Positive learning climate, Students with positive relationships, and Positive student-teacher relations.

Many stakeholders expressed concern that this level of connectedness and relationship would be at risk if students were to move to a separate middle school setting. The transition itself would be an activity that would have to be well planned for, handled delicately and given ample time in order to mitigate this concern.

Reports from staff and OurSCHOOL data also indicate higher than average levels of student anxiety and depression. This highlights the need that students continue to have a safe learning environment and receive appropriate supports.

#### 2) Academic achievement and preparedness

Overall indications are that students in the current K-8 setting are receiving good instruction and have access to all aspects of middle school curriculum. Current students articulated that they experience appropriate instruction and they like their teachers.

This is validated by the most recent (2019-2020) OurSCHOOL data which indicates a higher than provincial average in the following relevant categories: Effective learning time, (student) Effort, Expectations for success, Positive homework behaviors, Interest and motivation, Relevance, Rigor, and Students that value schooling outcomes.

The size of the gymnasium is small however the middle school PE curriculum can be accomplished within it. The school also has access to a standard sized field and track and other proximal outdoor recreational facilities. The computer lab is crowded yet has the same amount of accessible computers as other middle schools—ie enough to accommodate a full class of students. There is no science lab nor exploratory tech classrooms on site. The school has used outdoor space before for carpentry and has transported students to Carleton North High School for other technology classes. The school does not have lockers and the question emerged if this left students feeling unprepared for high school. The high school students all reported that figuring out lockers was a non-issue.

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The vast majority of high school students reported that they felt very equipped academically now that they were at high school. They expressed a typical sentiment that they had some anxiety before arriving but that changed once they started high school.

The provincial performance assessment of the school was examined however deemed non-relevant for the question at hand since the most recent data reflected the class of 2018-19.

### 3) K-8 school model

Current students, high school students, and K-8 staff expressed their support of a K-8 school model that takes advantages of multi-age mentoring and learning opportunities. Most high school students reported that they witnessed a mutual benefit both for themselves and the younger students at having a longer school experience together.

Some middle school students voiced a disdain for sharing space with younger students, especially the playground and bathroom areas. Part of this is specific to covid restrictions and part of it is due to limited space. The majority of current middle school students expressed an appreciation for sharing space with younger students. The majority of staff (representing elementary and middle) identified that the benefits of K-8 outweighed the drawbacks they experience. Parents and teachers expressed that the familiarity that develops in the elementary school makes the transition to middle school very easy. Research was also provided by a staff member, that articulated the benefit of K-8 versus 6-8.

### 4) Access to athletics

Access to extra-curricular athletics was a significantly voiced concern by most stakeholders. Parents were divided in terms of identifying this as a critical decision making point. Just over half of the parents who provided input preferred that students remain at Bath Community School, and the other parents who preferred the transfer to Florenceville Middle School mostly cited access to extra-curricular athletics as the primary reason.

Stakeholders who discussed this acknowledged that the small student body and lack of an adequate gymnasium contribute to the limited access. They also described options and alternatives that have occurred in the past to provide access. It was noted that attendance at Florenceville Middle did not guarantee access to a sports team.

The school has benefited in the past from coaches who have led sports involvement and made use of off-site gym facilities.

High school students who played sports currently did not identify this lack of access as a drawback.

### 5) Access to community events and initiatives

Older students (grade 8 and above), staff, and community stakeholders expressed that the close proximity of middle school students to the community provides more access for informal and formal community events and initiatives. It was reported that the community is comfortable with the school and therefore is more willing to support needs as they arise, as well as initiate contact with the school if there are problems to be addressed.

### 6) Facility

The functional capacity of Bath Community School indicates a limit of 240 students and identifies 10 classrooms. The current K-8 student population stands at 118 with an extra approximately 40

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children in the Early Learning program. This makes a total of 158 children, which means the school is at 66% capacity. Regardless, the school presents as crowded because of the negligible space available for providing services and holding meetings. The Early Childhood program, Step Ahead, is housed at the school and although in principle is an ideal partnership, the reality is that it takes up valuable space and exists in the midst of the regular K-8 area which means noise and disruption are normal. The program also shares bathrooms with the regular school age students. This year, the program purchased a portable sink to provide a separate hand washing and diaper changing station. Every class of students has its own independent classroom, and there is a designated computer lab. The computer lab also serves as an area for ESS programming supports. Every space is utilized in existing rooms for storage. There is only one staff bathroom which is located upstairs. Outside service providers have intervened with students while sitting on the floor in storage areas, and ESS meetings occur around the principal's desk. There is a library space in an external portable classroom. The gymnasium is not high enough for certain sports such as volleyball and basketball and does not have a full stage. There is no cafeteria in the building. Students can order lunch that is prepared by a local restaurant.

The projected enrollment of students coming up from elementary will remain consistent for the next five years. The average now is 13 per middle school homeroom and will remain at 13. Florenceville Middle School has space to accommodate the approximately 40 BCS students who would attend if they are transitioned to the school. This number of 40 is projected to be relatively consistent for the next five years. Florenceville Middle School offers MSTE classrooms, a cafeteria, and has a gym that is higher so can provide practice room for sports such as volleyball and basketball.

### 7) Staffing

In terms of staffing for teachers and administration, the process is based on current K-8 ratios for Bath Community School. If students move to Florenceville Middle School, the staffing numbers will be impacted and most likely will require less teaching staff as the students will be incorporated in to existing classes. It is projected that there would be one extra class based on current numbers for the 2021-22 year. This is a theme that does create concern and stress for teachers at both schools. It was also noted by staff that there is some benefit in working at a larger middle school where a teacher may have more opportunity to focus on fewer subjects. Currently at Bath Community School, middle school teachers must share a diverse teaching load.

### 8) Bussing

Bussing will be minimally impacted if students move to Florenceville Middle School. The morning bus pick up and after school drop off would remain the same as all children who attend Bath Community, Florenceville Middle Immersion, and Carleton North travel together currently. It will mean however approximately 10 extra minutes on bus in the morning.

### 9) Question of future plans for a new community school

Although this is a variable that is out of scope for this review, it is nevertheless an impactful theme that continued to be raised from staff, parents, and other community stakeholders. These groups expressed frustration and fatigue at what is perceived as an "unknown" in terms of future commitments for a community school. Parents are unclear if and when a new community school

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will be built and if there is still possibility of refurbishment of former Bath Middle School. This unknown contributes to hesitation and concern about moving students outside of the community.

### **Recommendation:**

Based on the themes of the findings and the proportion of opinion and input, *I would propose that ASD West maintain the current configuration of K-8 at Bath Community School.*

The overall reasons are:

- Students are in a well established connected and relationship focused school environment. Effective schools research supports that this is a fundamental consideration that impacts student health, wellbeing, and sets the necessary foundation for learning.
- Students are in a well established academic learning environment that enables students to be prepared and successful when transitioning to high school.
- A large majority of stakeholder engagement revealed that this recommendation is supported and preferred by the students, staff, and community.

Although not within the scope of this review, it is worth noting below the most pressing concerns of remaining at Bath Community School. Perhaps there is potential to reduce the negative impact of these through a collaborative problem solving approach:

- Lack of adequate meeting and bathroom space.
- Lack of exploratory opportunities on site.
- Limited access to full participation in school athletics.

Prepared and submitted by Tanya Whitney

April 14, 2021