



June 2, 2021

Dear students, parents, guardians, and staff of Robert Thirsk High School,

Yesterday I shared a school messenger with our school community and principals of our feeder schools pertaining to High School Engagement that contained incomplete and skewed information. I am writing today to provide greater depth and breadth of the factors behind the proposed plan, decision-making processes and clarify some of this information.

The purpose of the High School Engagement project is to create a sustainable system-wide plan for high schools that continues to offer students access, flexibility and choice in programming given available space and resources.

On June 1, the Calgary Board of Education released information regarding the proposed plan for high schools, seeking staff, student and parent feedback. As a point of clarification, the final decision is made by our Superintendents Team, not the CBE Board of Trustees.

The High School Engagement Planning Committee created the proposed plan based on the 23 decisions points outlined in the scenario engagement shared this past spring. The proposed plan recommendations are based on:

- CBE values and planning principles,
- Available space and resources,
- Financial sustainability
- Input from student, staff and community members.

My previous message reflected assumptions I have made regarding potential impacts on programming for Robert Thirsk High School based on declining enrolment. I realize that we have some CBE high schools that currently offer robust regular programming with enrolments below 700 students, that also include Advanced Placement and dual credit, learner supports and flexible programs, interschool sports and extracurricular, a range of complementary courses, and access to teacher and support staff.

In Scenario A - with recent expansion of French Immersion programs for K-9 in the north central and northwest part of the city, Robert Thirsk High School was considered as a potential fourth location to expand programming at high school. . The decision to not expand the French Program was based on feedback we received from students, parents and staff to maintain the cohort of French Immersion students (K-12). Feedback from our French Immersion parents indicated that redirecting students from Scenic Acres would divide this cohort group.

Scenario B proposed the redesignation of regular program communities of Nolan Hill and Sherwood, currently attending Sir Winston Churchill, to Robert Thirsk. This scenario was proposed in coordination with the consolidation of academic enrichment programs (IB) across CBE from five sites to four, resulting in the need for additional space at Sir Winston Churchill. As high school registration and student transfers commenced for the 2021 school year, we recognized that consolidating to four sites would not be possible due to increased enrollment in the IB programme across the City. This resulted in the additional space for IB no longer being required at Sir Winston Churchill, and therefore no need to redesignate the communities of Sherwood and Nolan Hill to Robert Thirsk. The redesignation to Robert Thirsk of these communities would mean an increase in transportation from Nolan Hill to 50 minutes, involving one transfer and walk from the CTrain. Nolan Hill communities currently have a current 32-minute school express route to Sir Winston Churchill. Transportation from Sherwood would have increased from a 24-minute school express route to a 46-minute transportation route including one transfer.

I am providing a revised table below, as I did not apply the correct provincial formula used by Alberta Education in the version shared with you yesterday. The provincial formula weights complex needs students differently and results in a higher utilization rate for the school. On average, you will note that the revised school utilization rate using the correct methodology and formula increases the utilization rate between 8-10% percentage points. This provincial formula has been used during our engagement process for all schools.

Year	Previous projected enrolment	Enrolment under new plan	Difference in number of students	Utilization rate under new plan
2022	1322	1213	-104	88.1%
2023	1459	1261	-196	91.8%
2024	1517	1209	-309	88.1%
2025	1462	1173	-289	85.6%
2026	1420	1105	-315	80.6%
2027	1360	1063	-297	77.6%
2028	1318	1019	-299	74.3%
2029	1256	1002	-254	72.8%

Knowing that space is projected to become available, it offers an opportunity for other initiatives to be considered that can meet student needs into the future while increasing building utilization. The proposed decision and declining utilization of Robert Thirsk High School is not a reflection of poor quality programming, but rather the current realities of geographic neighbourhoods in northwest Calgary. We are committed to continue offering a strong regular program to all students that attend Robert Thirsk High School.

All stakeholders have the opportunity to both provide and view feedback in the link, below from 1 – 13 June 2021. Providing all feedback through the link below ensures it is consolidated and considered when the final decision is made. On the website, you can also see all the information about this engagement including details about the scenarios shared above.

<https://www.cbe.ab.ca/get-involved/public-engagement/Pages/High-School-Engagement.aspx>

Again, my apologies for not providing a clearer rationale in my previous message and any additional confusion or anxiety yesterday's message may have caused.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Christison', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr. Matt Christison

Principal, Robert Thirsk High School

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