

Sherwood Park Boundary Consultation Common Questions



Thank you for your interest in providing your valuable input as we move through the boundary consultation process in the Sherwood Park urban area. Through the course of the consultation to date, people have come forward to us with excellent questions that EICS thought would be helpful to everyone as you provide your thoughts and advice during the next few weeks.

Is this consultation authentic and will the EICS Board of Trustees really listen to my input, or have they already made a decision?

Please understand that no decisions have been made and that this consultation is 100% authentic and credible. We know that a number of inaccuracies have made their way into local media and social media conversations, which was truly unfortunate and never our intention as a school division.

We want to hear from parents, staff and community members on how to deal effectively with population imbalances in our EICS Sherwood Park schools and this conversation will form the options that we will once again take to the community for their input before any decisions are made. In addition to the current ThoughtExchange process, parents will have another 3 opportunities to provide feedback:

1. A coffee house session at 6:30 on Tuesday, February 6th at Archbishop Jordan Catholic High School. This session will provide the community with the opportunity to meet with EICS Board of Trustees and system leaders and to view all the current data and options. Individuals will be available to answer questions and clarify data.
2. A survey that will be shared with all parents, staff and community members that will allow the community to provide feedback on the options presented at the coffee house. This feedback will inform the option or modified option recommended to the EICS Board of Trustees.
3. The final recommendation will be posted on our website for the community to comment on through regular channels prior to the decision on March 21st at the regularly scheduled Public Board Meeting.

Why are you doing this now?

We are doing this now as Holy Spirit will not be able to accommodate the growth expected next year. Also, the population imbalance is becoming more pronounced in our EICS Sherwood Park schools and future demographics, housing builds and population statistics all indicate that this current trend is not slowing down. Essentially, Sherwood Park is a very fast-growing community and our population has climbed 24.2 % over the past 10 years and our student numbers have increased by over 700 students. What complicates this even more is that most of the growth has occurred in one geographical area and not throughout the entire hamlet. We have schools at 47% student capacity and other schools at 94% - we need to create more balance in our school capacities so as all EICS students have the best educational experience possible.

Did you not see that demographics were changing the last few years and have planned more effectively?

Absolutely, EICS has been planning for Holy Spirit to reach full capacity for many years since the reconfiguration decision in 2012. In light of the significant restructuring throughout Sherwood Park, the Board made a conscious decision to not adjust Holy Spirit other than move the grade 9's to ABJ to alleviate overcrowding in order to not have too much change all at once in the community. Every year, EICS looks at all municipal and provincial data as we plan for school grade configurations and infrastructure requests in our capital plan.

The reality is that the Board has kept Holy Spirit status quo as long as possible and in 2018/19, it will lack the space to accommodate the students expected from its current boundaries. As well, this is where a large number of new housing developments that are slated to go over the next decade and growth is not slowing down. EICS is looking to create a long term solution that will be sustainable until a new school is built in Cambrian Crossing (expected 2030).

How is school capacity calculated?

Alberta Education mandates a formula that takes into account the grade configuration, instructional space and core amenities of the school. The government uses this amount to calculate a schools utilization in order to prioritize capital requests.

While this calculation provides an objective ability to assess feasibility, it is worth noting that this formula does not take into account the substantial difference in class sizes between the grades. While the recommended guidelines for class size are 17 in K-3 vs 25 in 7-9 or 27 in 10-12, the government's formula actually expects older students to require more instructional space. This flaw in the formula means that being at a high utilization is substantially more detrimental for an early years program vs a middle year's or high school program.

Why don't you just build a new school in the northern part of Sherwood Park?

Alberta Education assesses total utilization of all community schools when determining if it will build a new one. These school requests are not only ranked against other schools throughout the province but also against hospitals, bridges and universities. Typically, the province won't even consider a new school until a community is using more than 85% of its total capacity.

Currently, EICS schools in Sherwood Park are at 73% utilization and EICS cannot reasonably expect a new school to be announced and built before 2030 according to current projections. Our only option is utilize the space that we have in our existing schools. The two remaining school reserve sites north of Baseline Road are also not suitable due to significant safety concerns where the school would be too close to a pipeline and or a railway.

Have you looked at putting more portables on the school property for Holy Spirit Catholic School?

Unfortunately with spacing issues and the sharing of common property with our Elk Island Public School Division (Lakeland School) the placement of more portable classrooms is not an option on this site. The only school sites that can accommodate portables are Archbishop Jordan, St. Theresa and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Schools.

Will all these possible changes take place in September 2018?

There has been no decision on solutions or timelines to date. We realize that change is very challenging for our EICS parents, students and also our staff. We want to ensure that any changes that are proposed are done in such a manner that places our students well-being as the priority and allows for sufficient time to ensure whatever is chosen is implemented effectively.

Why don't you just start checking for baptismal certificates of students in our schools and not allowing in those students that are non-Catholic? Wouldn't that solve the problem?

Under existing Alberta Education guidelines, school divisions are not able to demand proof of sacraments including baptism from families and can only use the parents' declaration of faith as the basis for determining residency. As well, the actual number of non-Catholics attending our school division in the Sherwood Park schools is minimal and would not reduce the space requirements of our schools.

Wouldn't enforcing boundaries fix the problem for Holy Spirit Catholic School?

Holy Spirit has accepted students from outside of its boundary when it had the room and resources to accommodate requests. Over half of the boundary exemptions are from the areas of Aspen Trails and Emerald Hills that border Clover Bar Road and are in walking distance to the school, but currently zoned to Madonna and St Theresa. Now that the school is full, the school is no longer accepting students out of boundary. It is worth noting that many students who are zoned for Holy Spirit choose to attend St. Theresa, so the net impact of cross boundary on the school's total population is minor compared to the population of the school.

Eliminating cross boundary will not mitigate the large amount of students expected to attend from the Summerwood North subdivision.

Are you really accepting a lot of students from outside our community into Archbishop Jordan?

A review of student addresses has determined that Archbishop Jordan currently has 11 students from Edmonton, 6 from Fort Saskatchewan and none from St. Albert who are enrolled out of 1,347 total students.

With the popularity of a K-6, 7-9, 10-12 option in the community survey, why is there no K-6 option being presented?

In light of the amount this was suggested, Administration modelled countless permutations and combinations of school boundaries to create a sustainable model with this configuration. Due to the inability to expand, our current English early years schools are not large enough to accommodate future K-6 enrollments.

An option was presented to the Board where EPK became another English K-6 and OLPH became a French K-9, however, this was not accepted by the Board due to the following rationale:

- This option required substantial boundary changes and disruption for early years students.
- Grades 5, 6 and 9 programs would see significant reduction in educational opportunities and options available.
- Many facilities in this option exceed the capacity of its core amenities. For example, STT would exceed 1,000 students as the only 7-9 school.
- This option required board financing of capital improvements that exceeded its financial resources.

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