

Chignecto-Central Regional School Board
Policy B-02: School Consolidation and Reorganization

**Grade 9 Students From East Pictou Middle School, Thorburn
Consolidated, Trenton Middle Move to North Nova Education Centre**

Final Report
December 11, 2013

Background

New Glasgow Academy, a new Primary-Grade 8 school built to replace the former Temperance Street School at Brown, Acadia Street School, and New Glasgow Junior High school, is scheduled to open in September of 2014. As of that same date, the New Glasgow Grade 9 students who formerly would have attended New Glasgow Junior High will attend North Nova Education Centre (NNEC) instead. This decision makes NNEC, once a Grade 10-12 school, a Grade 9-12 school as of September, 2014.

As a result, the question arose whether it would be educationally and operationally appropriate that Grade 9 students from the other three of NNEC's feeder schools (East Pictou Middle School (EPMS), Thorburn Consolidated School and Trenton Middle School) be moved to North Nova Education Centre at the same time.

In October, 2013, the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board passed a motion to create a Study Action Committee to consider this issue.

Committee Membership

The membership of the Study Action Committee consists of:

- One School Advisory Council Member and one student from East Pictou: Jennifer Archibald and Macayla O'Brien.
- One School Advisory Council member and one student from Thorburn Consolidated: Stacy Smaldon and Tiffani Benoit.
- One School Advisory Council Member and one student from Trenton Middle: Crystal Rankin and Amber Butler.
- One School Advisory Council member and one student from North Nova Education Centre: Mike Willis and Spencer MacDonald.
- Two elected Board members and one First Nations Board Member: Gordon Anderson, Marilyn Murray and Andrea Paul.
- Three Board staff: Lynn MacLean, Ron Turnbull, and Scott Milner.
- Four principals (one each from East Pictou, Thorburn, Trenton, and North Nova Education Centre); Blair MacDonald, Stephen Barker, Shaun MacDonald, and Peter White.
- One non-voting representative from New Glasgow Junior High School: Mark Arbuckle.

Timeline and Input

The Study Action Committee held meetings on October 15, October 21, November 5, November 20 and December 2, 2013. A preliminary report to the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board was presented in camera on November 13. The public were invited to attend a meeting on November 20 at North Nova Education Centre to provide input and comments. The final report is to be presented to elected members at the public meeting of the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board on December 11. There will also be a second public meeting on December 12 for parents/guardians to hear the final report. On January 15, 2014 the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board is expected to make a final decision.

According to Board *Policy B-02- School Consolidation and Reorganization*, parents and guardians/caregivers can provide input at the Regular Public Board Meeting on December 11, 2013 or at the Regular Public Board Meeting on January 15, 2014.

Terms of Reference

The Study Action Committee considered the desirability of moving all Celtic Family East Grade 9 students to North Nova Education Centre in September, 2014, based on input from the public (individuals and/or groups) and other stakeholders, including students, around the following criteria:

- Educational and program implications and their effects on the progress of students.
- Financial implications.
- Transportation implications.
- Maintenance implications.
- Facilities implications.
- Effects on the social environment of the school and greater communities impacted.
- Lunchroom facilities.
- Socialization implications for students of the schools which may be consolidated.
- Student co-curricular activities.
- Student government finances.
- Traffic at schools to which students may be transferred.
- Other matters the Study Action Committee considered relevant.

Committee Recommendation and Rationale

This committee recommends that the Grade 9 students from East Pictou Middle School, Thorburn Consolidated School, and Trenton Middle School move to North Nova Education Centre in September, 2014.

The committee wishes to explicitly state that this recommendation is not a reflection of the feeder schools' quality of experience for their Grade 9 students; in fact, we are confident that the Grade 9 students, if they were to stay at their respective schools, would continue to receive the same excellent school experience they have always enjoyed.

The committee also acknowledges the challenges facing North Nova Education Centre as it works to accommodate the Grade 9 students and the differences these younger students will face at their new school. Indeed, students who have gone to NNEC from small feeder schools in the past have commented that life at North Nova Education Centre was overwhelming at the beginning. That being said, it is our experience that this feeling is not unusual at any school transition.

However, those students also report that life at NNEC very quickly became a positive experience. While the students' experience at their respective feeder schools has been excellent, there are many opportunities available at North Nova Education Centre that are not available at the feeder schools. The feeder schools' committee members themselves have noted that their schools tend to have expectations and approaches that suit the younger students well, while the Grade 9 students are often more prepared for high school than one might expect.

Furthermore, the fact that the Grade 9 students from New Glasgow are going to be attending North Nova Education Centre for certain played a strong role in this decision. The need for all grade 9 students from NNEC's feeder schools have the same school experience, at the same time, was a major consideration for the committee and therefore recommend the move to NNEC.

Committee's Deliberations

General: In preparation for the arrival of the New Glasgow Grade 9 students, a committee from North Nova Education Centre visited other Grade 9-12 facilities to study their policies and procedures. NNEC also established two staff committees to prepare for the Grade 9 students' arrival: one is considering the physical/structural decisions related to the Grade 9-12 school (*e.g.* the layout of the building, the timetable, *etc.*); the second is examining policy decisions related to the switch to a Grade 9-12 school (*e.g.* Orientation plans to welcome younger students, assessment issues, *etc.*). Their input has been most helpful to the Study Action Committee.

Educational and program implications and their effects on the progress of students: While high school students in grades 10-12 follow a credit system, students in Grade 9 follow the Grade 9 program of studies and the time allotments for each course as established by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. This would include: English Language Arts, French, Healthy Living, Mathematics, Physical Education, Science, Social Studies, and a minimum of one elective per year. This would continue to be the case for Grade 9 students at North Nova Education Centre.

The electives being considered for Grade 9 students, by NNEC, are Music, Family Studies, Technology Education, and Visual Arts. Not all of these electives are currently available at all of the feeder middle schools. Therefore, by offering them, North Nova Education Centre is giving all Grade 9 students the opportunity to explore these programs. The decisions regarding how many electives the students would take; whether the students would have a choice of electives; and how they would be delivered, have yet to be determined.

The Study Action Committee members expressed concerns regarding the academic and other supports available at a large school like North Nova Education Centre versus the supports in place presently at each of the middle schools. These supports include program support teachers, learning center staff, severe learning disability support, as well as special education and guidance.

However, as staff for these programs is allotted based upon per pupil formulae an increase in student population in a school would mean a corresponding increase in staffing in these specialist areas. For example, if all the Grade 9 students moved to North Nova Education Centre, then program support there could potentially increase by 1.3 Full-Time Equivalent positions.

Similarly, a decrease in the student population at a feeder school would translate into a corresponding reduction of specialist support in that school. For example, at East Pictou Middle School (EPMS), guidance is a very important and effective school-based support. A reduction in student population will lead to a reduction to guidance staff allotted to EPMS. Fewer students will remain, yet the need for guidance in a school and with a young adolescent population is still high.

Administration at North Nova Education Centre has assured the Study Action Committee that supports will be put in place for the Grade 9 students that will be equivalent to those that were provided to those students in their former schools. This would not be a change from current practice, but simply an extension of the school's tradition of offering a wide range of effective direct and indirect supports for students in need.

Students will still receive extra help from their teachers, and classroom and program support teachers will still intervene to help students with particular needs in the same ways that occurred at the students' former schools.

In fact, it can be argued that North Nova Education Centre will offer Grade 9 students significantly more support than they would receive at their middle schools. As a large high school, NNEC offers students access to many outside agencies and services including Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Roots for Youth, Addictions Services and Tearman/New Leaf; a nurse practitioner who works in the school's Youth Health Centre four days a week; and a doctor who comes to the school one half day a week. Students also have access to a full-service, stand-alone Special Education program; a full-time African Nova Scotian Support Worker and a full-time First Nations Student Support Worker; three guidance counselors; a police liaison officer; a librarian; and more.

Financial Implications: There will be some financial implications associated with moving the Grade 9 students. Furniture and resources will have to be moved to North Nova Education Centre or purchased to support the school's new population. Examples include, but are not limited to, 250 new chairs to allow the school to assemble in the gymnasium; new laptop carts to free up instructional spaces currently limited to one specific use as a technology lab, etc.

Other physical/financial stresses would result from the influx of Grade 9 students to North Nova Education Centre. The existing support staff would need to be enhanced. The increase in enrolment would mean additional administrative assistant time of 15 hours for NNEC and, perhaps, reduced administrative time for two of the feeder schools. There may also be increases in custodial services at NNEC and decreases at the feeder schools.

With fewer students, the feeder schools' cafeteria sales will be impacted. For example, the removal of Grade 9 students from EPMS (one third of the current school population) will ultimately affect cafeteria service and sales at the school. At Thorburn Consolidated, a smaller percentage of students (around 10%) will be leaving but it will still make a significant difference to their profits. While Trenton Middle School

currently serves about 60- 70% of its students at its cafeteria, its profits will also be affected if the Grade 9 students leave.

Transportation implications: Since there are already established bus routes for North Nova Education Centre, there will be no changes in this area. There is also room on the buses for the Grade 9 students. However, Grade 9 students will need to transfer to other buses at two of the feeder schools. There will need to be an examination of the wait times to see if they can be reduced at the feeder schools.

Maintenance implications: With the exception of the greatly increased wear and tear on North Nova Education Centre due to a 33% increase in student body, there should not be any unforeseeable changes in the maintenance of the facilities. The same utilities will apply, including heat, lights, and power. Snow removal needs and grounds keeping challenges should not change. There will be a shift in some of the consumables such as water, toilet paper and soap, but this should be a simple transfer rather than an increase within the Family.

Space and Facilities implications: Storage is an issue at North Nova Education Centre, as it is in most schools. Property Services will need to be informed if there is any extra equipment that would need to be transferred between facilities. If so, Property Services might need to look at also transferring a storage shed to NNEC.

Parking will continue to be a challenge at North Nova Education Centre. Property Services may need to designate more spots for staff and visitor parking. Property Services do not technically provide student parking, but this will be indirectly impacted if the Grade 9 students move and more staff/visitor spaces are required.

Obviously, there would be increased traffic at North Nova Education Centre if the Grade 9 students move there. This will demand a greater level of patience and cooperation between and among members of the school community, a couple of times each school day, but should not prove to be too great a challenge for anyone.

Property Services is discussing what might happen at the feeder schools if the Grade 9 students leave. If the Board is able to remove classrooms or program area from regular usage, they could potentially look at reducing the level of custodial support in those facilities.

North Nova Education Centre is a large facility with 146, 234 square feet. According to the 2012 CCRSB Identification Reports, North Nova Education Centre was built for 1110 students. There are currently 1060 student lockers in the school and projected enrolment including the Grade 9 students is below 1060. The school also has approximately 54 instructional spaces, which will accommodate all students, including the Grade 9 students.

Though the capacity at NNEC will be tested with the arrival of the Grade 9 students, especially during the first year, the school will still be below official capacity. For example, the gymnasium's capacity for an assembly is "1327 standing and non-fixed seating" as per the Fire Marshall; a number that will be approached but still not exceeded by the new Grade 9- 12 configuration.

There are perceptions in the minds of some students unfamiliar with North Nova Education Centre that the school is currently over-crowded, even though it is functioning at about 200 students below its actual capacity. This may be the result of those students' coming from schools with excess space and small class sizes. For example, EPMS has large hallways, numerous classrooms, a science lab and computer labs as well as a significant amount of square footage as it was originally built for a larger student population. This comparison may lead to the perception that North Nova Education Centre is crowded.

Effect on the social development of the Grade 9 students: There is no question that the Grade 9 students are involved in various leadership roles at their feeder schools. For instance, the Grade 9 students at Thorburn Consolidated School are a large part of the student leader program and playground activity leader program. Their maturity and guidance is relied upon to set a positive tone among the students and they serve as role models for the younger students. The extra-curricular programs also rely on the Grade 9 students to provide leadership and experience. The Grade 9 students from Trenton Middle also hold leadership roles and help in organizing events and assemblies. Students from both schools also benefit from support from guidance and outside agencies.

This is also true of East Pictou Middle School where many supports are offered to students through guidance, teams and clubs, as well as support from outside agencies. EPMS has joined in community partnerships with Mental Health, Addictions, and Active Pictou County, all of which have helped in furthering the social development of the students in a positive way.

East Pictou Middle School, Thorburn Consolidated and Trenton Middle have adopted the PEBS model to support and develop students in positive and effective ways. They have reduced both in-school and out-of-school suspensions and work very hard to understand the students and their communities. The feeder schools have worked hard to invite the community into their schools, encouraging strong communication between home and school and promoting Grade 9 students as mentors to younger students. These roles are beneficial to the students, and will be difficult to replicate or replace at North Nova Education Centre.

Socialization implications for students: Without disputing the loss of some very important opportunities for social development, as noted above, the Committee nevertheless sees the opportunity for social growth as one of the most significant positives of having the Grade 9 students move to North Nova Education Centre. Because of the demographics of each of the feeder schools in question, students may not have the opportunity to experience the richness and diversity that a larger student body could provide. For example, in many cases the students may have been with the same classmates since Primary, limiting their contact with people with different ideas, cultures and backgrounds. As members of a larger body of students, they will find others who share their interests, as well as a rich diversity that they have so far not enjoyed at their smaller schools.

Lunchroom facilities: Currently North Nova Education Centre has one, 50-minute lunch break. Food service in the cafeteria is contracted to Chartwells, a private food service provider. The cafeteria features seating for 350 and has a main counter as well as a "grab and go" station just off the main dining area. NNEC is currently working with its food services provider to enhance the cafeteria service to allow for all students, grades 9- 12, to be served during one lunch hour.

Student co-curricular and extra-curricular activities: North Nova Education Centre offers many co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The school believes in providing as many opportunities as possible for students and will do all it can to ensure the Grade 9 students are provided the same opportunities as all other students to participate.

Co- and extra-curricular activities of the feeder schools would be impacted by the transfer of the Grade 9 students.

At EPMS, questions arose around the size of teams, having enough students to field teams, as well as the development of younger athletes, as they are typically mentored by older players. With a reduction in students also comes a reduction in staffing, and there is a worry about having teachers who are willing or able to run intramural programs.

If the Grade 9 students leave Thorburn and Trenton Middle School, the schools will also lose many of their leaders in extra-curricular programs. However this does provide an opportunity for grade 6 students to participate in middle school activities. Overall this configuration will allow for a more consistency in extra-curricular programs across the Celtic Family.

Student government finances: In regard to the feeder schools, some Study Action Committee members worried that the Grade 9 students may have been the ones who helped support school fund raising activities and, therefore, there could be a decline in funds raised at the feeder schools. However, the feeder schools' administrators noted that the Grade 9 students have actually played a limited role in fundraising at their schools.

Other Issues: North Nova Education Centre has asked that special consideration be given and extra supports assigned the first in-take year (September 2014) for Grade 9 students. Some of these supports are material, i.e. furniture and technology. Others are related to programming, such as the need to meet the challenge of orienting over 50% of the student body next year (more than half of the school's students will be new to the school in 2014!) with two orientation days (Spring 2014 and September 2014) dedicated to those new students only. There will also need to be orientation sessions for parents and guardians.

The issue of the high school environment presenting new, more social and emotional challenges to the Grade 9 students has been raised several times during the work of the Study Action Committee. There is no doubt that the climate and culture of a high school is different from that of a middle school. However, the staff at North Nova Education Centre has committed to doing all it can to support students during their transition to the new school and is confident that students and their parents alike will be very pleased with the overall school experience offered at NNEC.

Observations for future considerations: The Study Committee also discussed the future of East Pictou Middle and Trenton Middle Schools as both are on the Capital Construction list. Once the Grade 9 students leave, there will be approximately 120 students left at EPMS. If the Report from the East Pictou SAC is accepted, then moving the Grade 7 and Grade 8 students to FH MacDonald School needs to become a priority. This is best for the students and a significant financial saving to the Board. Trenton Middle will have approximately 150 students and they should be combined with the 160 elementary students. There is a recommendation for a new Primary-Grade 8 school which would eliminate the costs of two older buildings, again with savings to the Board.

Feedback from Public meeting: One of the requirements of *Policy B-02* is to hold a public meeting for parents/guardians after the School Board has received the Preliminary Report. This was held on November 20, at North Nova Education Centre. The purpose of the meeting was to share the information that the Study Committee had collected and to gather input from parents and guardians from East Pictou Middle School, Thorburn Consolidated and Trenton Middle schools. In addition to the members of the Study Committee, there were approximately 20 people in attendance.

The majority of those in attendance supported the concept of moving the Grade 9 students from the feeder schools to North Nova Education Centre with no strong opposition. Many of the questions centered on transitioning from the feeder schools to NNEC and, in particular, what supports would be put in place for students with needs. Mr. White, principal of North Nova Education Centre, shared the work that has been completed by the two committees at NNEC in preparation for the arrival of New Glasgow Grade 9 students as well as answering questions posed by the parents. In particular, parents asked for clarification on Teacher Advisory Groups (TAG), timetable and semestering, academic support for students, space (perception of overcrowding), class size, and lunch break. North Nova Education Centre was acknowledged for visiting Grade 9-12 schools and learning how those schools were organized. Some parents expressed concern about the mixing of younger and older students and others questioned whether or not current Grade 8 students would be ready to attend NNEC. There were a few questions on bussing which the Pupil Transportation Foreman for Celtic Family addressed.

Recommendation from committee:

Students who have gone to NNEC from small feeder schools in the past have commented that life at North Nova Education Centre was overwhelming at the beginning but soon became a positive experience. While the students' experience at their respective feeder schools has been excellent, there are many opportunities available at NNEC that are not available at the feeder schools. The feeder schools have expectations and approaches that suit the younger students well, while often the Grade 9 students are more prepared for high school.

Though there are many details to work out and important issues to deal with, **this committee recommends that the Grade 9 students from East Pictou Middle School, Thorburn Consolidated School and Trenton Middle School move to North Nova Education Centre in September 2014.**

In order for this transition to move forward as smoothly as possible, the Study Committee also recommends:

- (a) Create a communication plan for students and parents detailing the transition from the feeder schools to NNEC.**
- (b) Release time be provided to NNEC in order to finalize policies and procedures and to ensure the transition of students and staff is as smooth as possible.**
- (c) Two Orientation Days be held. One day in the spring, allowing the Grade 8 and Grade 9 students to visit North Nova Education Centre without the older students present. As well, Grade 8 and Grade 9 students should spend their first day in September by themselves with the rest of the student population starting the second day. Funds will also need to be provided to cover the cost of bussing the students from the feeder schools to NNEC in the spring.**

- (d) Where appropriate, renovate technology classrooms to ones that would have a dual purpose. This would also mean the purchase of a cart or carts of laptops.
- (e) Consideration given for Grade 9 electives: establish an innovation lab for Grade 9 technology Education; art tables, chairs and materials; music instruments.
- (f) Funds be made available to purchase chairs and desks and chairs for gymnasium.
- (g) Laptops be provided for teachers who will have to share a room.

The Study Action Committee recommends that this list not be seen as exhaustive and that there is a possibility that the transition of students and staff to North Nova Education Centre may require a few additional resources. This will ensure that the transition from the feeder schools to North Nova Education Centre is completed in the best interest of the students and staff.