

BSEC Meeting January 26, 2016
Budget Consultation: Staffing – Parent Response

General Comments

- Difficult for parents to understand the context of staffing requirements in schools.
- In general, parents are concerned first with their own child's classroom, then their school, then district staffing needs. The majority of parents don't understand the big picture of how decisions around staffing are made - funding, enrolment projections, FTEs, district positions that service multiple schools (psychologist, occupational therapist, other learning supports etc.), union contract stipulations. Rather they are concerned with their child's classroom - and foremost want to know whether their child's needs are being met and whether the teacher has the support to meet the needs of all the kids in the classroom.
- Parents appreciate being asked for their input, however without that understanding, their requests may not be realistic. That said, consider their suggestions as coming from people who are looking at what they think is needed in our classrooms, unimpeded by knowledge about how it is currently being done.
- Ask the teachers what they need in order to do their job successfully
- Look at how other districts staff their schools for ideas

1. What should be the base or minimum staffing in all elementary schools? In secondary schools? Consider principals, vice-principals, teachers, EAs, counsellors, librarians, clerical and custodial staff. Also consider transportation staffing bussing students to varying learning environments.

All schools:

- a VP or designate/TIC, to attend to admin duties when Principal attending district events so as not to leave a void at the school or a heavy load for the Principal upon return
- increased library time to maintain library, as well as assist students and staff
- increased counselling staff – in addition to increased time to work with individual students, facilitate groups with behavioural & social skills challenges, problem solving, anxiety, etc., improving classroom learning environment for all
- sufficient EAs to attend to needs of students requiring assistance to improve learning environment for all
- one staffing formula does not fit all schools in this district because of different configurations, sizes and location

Elementary Schools:

- Single grade: 1 full time teacher + 1 EA per class.
- Multi-grade: 1 full time teacher + 2 EAs
- If <200 students: 1.0 principal, 0.5 VP, 1.0 librarian, 1.0 custodian, 1.0 AbEd, 1.0 music teacher, 1.0 secretary, 0.5 counsellor
- If >200 students: above + 0.5 VP (total 1 VP), 1.0 custodian (total 2 custodians), 1.0 counselor for students, staff and parents (very much needed)

Secondary Schools:

- staff core/required courses below maximum class size to allow flexibility, both for current students and to accommodate new students

- adequate teaching staff to allow ALL students to take ALL required courses in the classroom; online/distance ed courses should be an option, but not a requirement for students to complete their required courses; not all learners are successful with that type of learning
- provide sufficient electives so that all students, especially in junior secondary grades, have full timetables
- counsellors, learning assistance and admin should be full time in larger schools, not be teaching classes
- sufficient admin, library, learning assistance, counselling and other support services improves the overall quality of education for all students, but particularly for the most vulnerable. Student leaders who want to initiate things that would benefit others need access to administrators and counsellors

Other Staff

- Busing: increase number of buses available to all schools to alleviate scheduling confusion when buses are not available
- Psychology: Are two District Psychologists enough to service the entire district? Is there a backlog of requests for students waiting to be assessed? While students are awaiting assessment and not receiving support, learning opportunities for all students in that class are compromised.
- IT – Creston went without a technician for months, need enough technicians on staff all the time to keep maintain computer equipment and internet connectivity
- Creston schools feel underserved in general

2. What should trigger increases to the minimum staffing levels in elementary schools? In secondary schools?

- consider the classroom composition, including challenging non-funded students (academic or behavioral, those waiting for assessments, those who commence after cut off dates for special ed funding) when determining the number of students in a class since it affects the learning environment in a classroom
- odd (“inconvenient”, not related to class number max) numbers of students
- additional student registration over the summer months
- need should trigger increases: e.g., if a Principal believes that another 0.5 custodian is needed, or more clerical time, another EA for a group of students or individual, or that staff feels that regrouping students for an afternoon with another teacher would lead to more successful math learning - then do it.

3. What changes to district services for students would improve student learning opportunities and better address student needs? e.g., increased, or decreased, course or program choices? More counselling time? Collaboration time?

- increase program and course choices with qualified teachers and associated resources; facilitate collaboration between schools in a family to share and trade resources, e.g., offer wood or metal shop at one school, foods at another school

- increase elective choices, but only offer those that will run – determine a more reliable way to confirm registration so that electives are not cancelled due to low enrollment. Electives are important - sometimes the electives are what keep the students in school; every school will offer the core courses; the electives and extra-curricular events make the school special, or provide a hook to carry students (especially those without academic aspirations) through high school.
- Improve student learning opportunities – and decrease program choices. Increase student-led research topics, inquiry learning opportunities, independent discovery (drawing in community members/masters; teachers facilitate learning). Crawford Bay has great examples of what they manage to do for the students in a very remote low population school.
- provide challenging courses
- increase assistance for students who fall behind
- look for ways to facilitate teacher/student relationships
- increase counselling time due to growing concerns about mental health issues as well as to assist with career planning
- More collaboration time for teachers and EAs, especially with introduction of new curriculum, emphasis on place and project based cross-curricular learning
- increase collaboration time for students
- increase resources for staff to support their own wellness
- facilitate professional development opportunities for staff to increase their proficiency in teaching senior grade and AP courses
- ensure teachers are able to teach in their specialty area
- music and arts programs
- treat teachers well – financially and any other perks we can afford

4. What underlying principles should guide our decision-making around staffing?

- students' best interest, school cohesion, and then community as a whole
- Each school should be evaluated based on the needs of that specific student population and what it would take to meet academic, social/emotional and behavioural needs of the students.
- counsellors & admin staff should not have to teach
- always staff slightly below the maximum class size to allow flexibility and the ability to accommodate new students; when students are turned away and go to independent schools, it is difficult to pull them back in to the public system
- Best Practice. Flexibility - share resources, including staffing. Proactive. This is an area where we should not be stingy. Especially when considering support professionals: EA's, Aboriginal Coordinators, psychologists/psychiatrists/counsellors, research librarians, music and art professionals, etc. Maybe even some schools could share a Vice Principal once in a while, or have a traveling one in the district - it would be a great resource and support for the staff!

Additional comments & questions

- Are all staffing decisions based on student enrollment?
- Is there a minimum school enrollment below which a school is closed?
- Is a principal required for all schools regardless of enrollment?
- Hire more young teachers.
- Hire teachers for courses for which we need instructors
- Encourage/reward students of all grade levels who may not be strong academically but demonstrate effort and good attitude. When those students are in secondary grade levels take them to visit campuses where they could possibly attend. Introduce them to community businesses where they could be trained/employed.
- Staff should be offered permanent contracts so that they are part of the school, want to plan to learn and grow with their students and other teaching staff.
- Provide the time/\$ required to support teaching methods that are proven best to facilitate learning
- provide support to schools that are struggling to create timetables
- be proactive – if challenges anticipated in the spring, solve them before school starts in the fall
- hire staff before the term begins