



NANAIMO LADYSMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BUSINESS COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING INFORMATION SHEET

DATE: February 8, 2023
TO: Business Committee
FROM: Mark Walsh, Secretary-Treasurer
SUBJECT: 2023/24 Enrolment Projection (Three Year)

Background

The Ministry of Education and Child Care requires that all School Districts in British Columbia provide a three-year enrolment estimate, due each year in mid-February. Year one of the projection is used to calculate our “estimated” Operating Grant allocation for the upcoming school year. The funding generated from this estimate via the Ministry of Education and Child Care’s Funding Allocation System (FAS) is announced in mid-March and provides the largest source of revenue in support of our Preliminary Annual Budget. Year two and three estimates are used to facilitate provincial, and district based budgeting and financial planning.

The enrolment figures that make up our Preliminary Annual Budget are then adjusted in December, after the September 1701 Student Data Collection has been submitted and enrolment figures are verified by Ministry. At this time, funding levels may be increased or decreased depending on the accuracy of our enrolment projections, and due to any changes in per student funding rates or categories. Funding adjustments that are due to a variance from estimated to confirmed student enrolment numbers are incorporated and presented in the districts Amended Annual Budget each February, along with any necessary expense changes to balance the budget.

In order to comply with section 106.3 (2) of the School Act, enrolment must be estimated to include the number of students who may be enrolled in educational programs provided by the board, at three distinct intervals, and for specific student categories, for the coming school year: due each year on or before February 15th.

Specifically, the intervals and categories are as follows:

- September Enrolment Count – includes school-age, adult, special needs, Indigenous Education and English Language Learning students
- February Enrolment Count – includes Continuing Education, Online Learning, special needs enrolment growth and newcomer refugee students
- May Enrolment Count - includes Continuing Education and Online Learning students

Discussion:

In early October of each year, directly following the 1701 Student Data Collection, the district sends our data file to an external consultant called Baragar Systems, who provides custom planning software for school districts across the province.

Our student data is then used in conjunction with demographic trends, school migration trends, birth rates, student participation, and a number of other minor factors to produce our districts annual enrolment projection.

The projections provide five years of our historic enrolment, and fifteen years of future estimated student enrolment. However, as Baragar Systems does not take local development into account it is only suitable for short term projections, not long-term facility, or operational planning.

After we receive the Baragar data, we consider any local knowledge that may have an immediate impact (Year 1) on funded student enrolment, we then compare Baragar's results with historical student enrolment trends, as well as current student enrolment, and then assign projections to schools.

For the Preliminary Operating Budget, we tend to project somewhat conservatively in order to avoid being overfunded by the Ministry and to ensure that we do not issue staffing to individual sites that is not supported by student enrolment. Following the initial staffing allocations provided to schools based on estimated enrolment in mid April, district staff then monitor student registrations very closely and additional staffing may be provided if student enrolment exceeds our initial projections. This approach allows us to identify where there are additional students who require educational support and provide staffing specifically to those sites.

As the board is aware, our 2022/23 projections were more optimistic than in previous years and unfortunately, we missed our targets at elementary and for our distributed learning program. Still to be determined if this downward trend is a post-COVID result due to continued community uncertainty, or because of inflation and the current costs of living in Nanaimo.

Further, our external projection consultants have performed a preliminary review of longer-term projections based on additional years of data. The preliminary data continues to highlight significant growth but at a slightly less elevated state. We continue to review the dynamics but one issue that stands out particularly in the recent past is that older people are outcompeting families for housing in some areas of the district. Further insight into the trends will be brought to the Board associated with the Rutherford discussion in the near term.

For 2023/24 we have therefore reverted to a more conservative approach which not only protects the district from financial loss associated with potentially over estimating enrolment, but also allows us some room to respond to actual student needs, if we do in fact exceed our initial estimates. Our estimates are accounting for a notable downward trend of enrolment at Elementary as compared to the last few years growth, which is now moving into our Secondary schools where enrolment is increasing with those larger cohorts entering grade 8 and moving through to graduation.

Elementary enrolment within our 2022/23 Amended Annual Budget is 8875 and we are projecting 8860 for the coming year, a decrease of 15 students. At Secondary our 2022/23 actual funded Full Time Equivalent (FTE) enrolment was 5389.126 and we are estimating 5470.226 for an increase of 81.1 student FTE; a combined increase of 66.10FTE.

With regards to our distributed learning option available through Island Connect Ed, we are seeing a downward trend here also. However, as a reminder to the Board, our on-line learning program saw a substantial increase during COVID which is slowly reverting to pre-COVID attendance. As well, the district is no longer able to provide online educational services to students outside our district which must also be accounted for.

Our original 2022/23 estimates for the distributed learning program's three funding snapshots (September, February and May) was for a total of 596.225 Funded Student FTE. Our actual student count in September came in 72.662 less than projected, and we've adjusted our estimates for the coming February and May count as they also look to be lower than originally anticipated, by another 67 student FTE for a 2022/23 downturn of 139.662 FTE.

For 2023/24 there is an additional reduction to the estimated number of funded student FTE attendance in online learning of 42.375FTE which puts the total estimated student FTE for September, February and May's educational delivery at 414.188FTE. This figure reflects more pre-COVID attendance levels, as well as accounts for the loss of providing educational delivery to students outside of our district's boundary. Preliminary staffing levels will be based on this adjusted enrolment estimate which will see a decrease to current staffing levels, however, the district will be closely monitoring online registrations and if we see enrolment surpass projections, staffing resources will be provided to support the additional students.

Finally, with regards to projections for the Unique Student Needs categories which includes Indigenous Education, English Language Learners and Special Education students, estimates account for the current school years student numbers, less the exiting grade 12 cohorts, plus an average of the historic number of incoming Kindergarten students. We consider in and out migration flat for preliminary projections and then we track registrations throughout the spring where we can respond to additional student needs if required. As these funding categories are significant, this approach allows us to mitigate financial risk associated with missing targets and direct educational supports to incoming students.

There are three appendices attached, the first provides a summary of our three-year enrolment projection due to the Ministry of Education and Childcare but for information purposes also presents our 2022/23 budgeted enrolment and our actual enrolment per the September 29th student data collection. The adjusted revenue is reflected in our 2022/23 Amended Annual Budget.

The second is the official Ministry of Education and Child Care Enrolment Projection document, due by February 15th. And the third presents the estimated financial impact of our projected enrolment figures as compared to the current 2022/23 Annual Amended Budget.

Appendix A - Summary of the Districts Enrolment Projections for 2023/24 to 2025/26

Appendix B - 2023/24 to 2025/26 Ministry of Education and Child Care Enrolment Estimate document

Appendix C - 2023/24 Preliminary Operating Grant estimate based on projected enrolment