



**NANAIMO LADYSMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BUSINESS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC MEETING
ACTION SHEET**

DATE: September 11, 2024
TO: Business Committee
FROM: Mark Walsh, Secretary-Treasurer and
Gillian Robinson, Executive Director of Communications and Privacy
SUBJECT: Rutherford Re-Opening – Consultation and Final Recommendations

Recommendation:

The Business Committee recommends that the Board of Education of School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) approve the 11 recommendations for the re-opening of Rutherford Elementary including the redrawn boundaries and transfer of students in the newly created Rutherford and Frank J. Ney boundaries.

Background:

On May 15, 2024, the Board passed the following motion:

That the Board of Education of School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) approve in principle the Rutherford Working Group's reopening plan recommendations (the "Recommendations") including the redrawn boundaries and transfer of students in the newly created Rutherford and Frank J. Ney boundaries and send the Recommendations to the community for consultation with final approval in the fall of 2024.

This action sheet outlines the results of the consultations process. In addition, it contains the final recommendations based on feedback from the community and District operational needs.

Discussion:

Consultation summary

June 2024 Information to families and community:

- Four information emails were sent by the principals of Departure Bay, Randerson, Cilaire, Rock City, Frank J Ney, McGirr and Uplands Park on May 17, May 31, June 10, and June 20. This included background information, link to information website and a link to the survey.
- NLPS Communications proactively reached out to the Nanaimo News Now and Nanaimo Bulletin and provided a technical briefing on the proposed catchment boundary changes. This resulted in two print/online articles.

Summary of consultation on proposed catchment boundary changes for Rutherford reopening:

Consultation was approached through the following activities:

- DPAC meeting
- PAC meetings as requested by Frank J Ney, Departure Bay
- Survey June 11 to June 30
- Email feedback to RutherfordConsultation@sd68.bc.ca

Summary of consultation participation and feedback:

Emails to RutherfordConsultation@sd68.bc.ca - Total number of emails received: 30

Survey Monkey survey for caregivers - Survey Responses: 352

*Overall consultation themes:**Survey response summary:*

- Survey respondents were primarily parents (97%) with the most responses coming from parents at Randerson Ridge, Departure Bay, and Frank J Ney (28%, 26% and 21%, respectively.)
- 86% of the respondents said they were either very aware or somewhat aware of the proposed catchment boundary changes.
- 58% learned of the proposed catchment boundary changes in an email from the school principal, 23% from word of mouth and 8% from local news sources.
- 56% said the proposed catchment boundary changes do not change their catchment school. 43% said the proposed catchment boundary changes would change their child/children's catchment school.
- Of those whose catchment boundary school would change, 32% said the distance to school would be longer and 32% said the distance to the new school would be shorter.
- 35% said the new school would not present any transportation challenges while 15% said the new school is not walkable and 15% said it would be a longer commute to the new catchment school.
- 70% of respondents said adjusting to a new school community was at the top of mind when considering the new catchment boundaries. 35% said they had concerns about impact to academic performance, 32% said the impact on before and after-school care and 32% the impact of a longer commute.
- For students that were aware of the proposed catchment boundary changes, 61% said being separated from their friend group was top of mind, 39% said being unfamiliar with a new school and its surroundings, 37% said new principals and teachers, and 28% said not having the support that they have at their current school.
- 61% of respondents said that they anticipated a benefit of the catchment boundary changes would be less crowded schools and fewer students in portables, 30% said more access to school facilities, 20% said shorter travel times for students, 20% said enhanced learning opportunities and 25% did not see any benefits. 16% said they saw the potential for new friend groups and more friends in their neighbourhood.
- 149 respondents provided additional comments. Grouped by theme, comments included:
 - (26 comments) The proposed move is too disruptive/stressful/causing anxiety.

- (17 comments) Supportive of the proposed catchment boundary changes.
- (13 comments) Concerns about being separated from friend/friend groups.
- (11 comments) Transportation challenges to new catchment school.
- (8 comments) Living right on the border of new catchment boundary.
- (8 comments) Current out of catchment students should have to move schools first and make room for current students whose catchment has changed.
- (8 comments) Traffic/road safety concerns about commute to new catchment school. (Specifically, Hammond Bay Road.)
- (8 comments) Rutherford should not have been closed.
- (6 comments) Before and after school childcare (disruptions, concerns about losing current.)
- (6 comments) Purchased their current home for the school catchment area.
- (6 comments) Concerns about losing current EA/educational supports.
- (2 comments) Moved schools when Rutherford closed and now having to move again.
- Through the survey, we looked at each address submitted where families said the boundary change resulted in a longer commute, was not walkable, further distance from current school and the majority of the addresses submitted were where parents felt the route to the new school was not walkable.
 - The majority of these addresses were for families moving to Rutherford Elementary and the new commute requiring students to cross Hammond Bay Road.
 - Other areas noted were the new Cilaire catchment boundary for families living closer to the north end of the boundary. However, it is important to note that current Departure Bay families will not be required to move to Cilaire.
 - For the Oak Ridge area addresses, the driving commute to Frank J Ney Elementary is further than Departure Bay Elementary. Some parents noted that if they work towards the city centre, they are adding to their commute if they are dropping off at Frank J Ney on their way to work, creating a longer commute.
 - There are approximately two addresses where it was noted the boundary may run down the middle of the street.

Emails to RutherfordConsultation@sd68.bc.ca:

**Note: Due to containing private personal information, full emails have been provided separately to trustees.*

- Email feedback is primarily related to unique student/family personal circumstances.
- Themes highlighted:
 - Childcare disruptions: before/after school/ProD days (3)
 - Anxiety/mental health/friendships (8)
 - Concerns about losing support (educational/mental health) in place at current school (3)
 - Questions about how to apply for out of catchment (3)
 - Unfair that current out of catchment students don't have to leave and students currently in-catchment will have to leave/don't get to stay. (5)
 - Traffic/safety concerns (3)
 - Clarification/confirmation of which catchment address is in. (6)

School-specific consultation:

As noted, District staff attended two school parent advisory council (PAC) meetings at the request of the Frank J. Ney and Departure Bay PACs.

Staff presented the basis for the recommendations and responded to questions and listened to and responded to concerns. Specific concerns while reflected in the general feedback also contained some very specific concerns including:

- The impact on student mental health in transitioning schools.
- The impact on local informal networks providing mutual support and childcare.
- A concern about the impact of grade 7 legacy students and their siblings, particularly at Departure Bay.
- Concerns about transportation.
- Requests for the ability to stay at their school if they chose to.

Overall consultation summary:

From in-person meetings, the online survey, and email submissions, we heard clearly from caregivers that the primary concerns about the catchment boundary changes include:

- Anxiety/mental health/loss of friendships.
- Safe active transportation concerns, particularly crossing Hammond Bay Road.
- Potential disruptions to childcare.
- Preference for out of catchment should be given to students who are impacted by the proposed catchment boundary changes.

We also heard from many caregivers in the survey who were supportive of Rutherford Elementary reopening as well as the proposed catchment boundary changes.

Emails submitted to RutherfordConsultation@sd68.bc.ca were replied to with additional information as requested, or if information was not required, those who emailed were informed that their comments would be shared with the Board.

Final Recommendations

Attached to this Action Sheet is the following document that should be read in conjunction with this report:

Draft Recommendations dated May 15, 2024 (the “First Report”).

In addition to the consultation between the First Report and this action sheet, the District has further refined its local growth and enrollment projections to 2035. The enrollment projections continue to project significant growth. However, we do note that general provincial enrollment data indicates less growth.

The District projections are based on collaboration with our local governments who provide anticipated housing construction. The District then applies a formula for how many students will live in each housing type and are projected down to specific neighbourhoods. Provincial projections are more focused on demographic and immigration patterns which are projected to slow. This discrepancy does present a risk. However, even if enrollment maintains at its current levels, north end schools are already over capacity.

Given this dynamic and school needs, the enrollment projections continue to support the reopening of Rutherford.

Based on the feedback, staff are continuing to propose the same six recommendations from the First Report with minor edits noted in the document. Staff are also making five additional recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. That the catchments presented for McGirr, Randerson, Frank J Ney, Departure Bay, Uplands Park, Cilaire, Rutherford and Rock City be instituted upon final approval of the Board following consultation to take effect January 2025.
2. That students located in the new Rutherford and revised Frank J Ney catchments be required to attend their catchment school as of September 2025 with the exception of students beginning grade 7 in 2025.
3. That students required to attend their new catchment schools as of September 2025 be given priority cross boundary transfer in the event of sufficient space and staffing to support them.
4. That currently enrolled Departure Bay students who are required to attend Frank J. Ney due to the catchment shift are provided access to Wellington Secondary if their sibling(s) attend the school.
5. That the District proceed with upgrading Rutherford using minor capital funding from the Ministry of Education and Child Care and the Annual Facilities Grant as appropriate.
6. That the bus route instituted to Frank J Ney following the closure of Rutherford be eliminated as of September 2025.

Staff are making the following five additional recommendations as follows:

7. That the siblings of grade 7 students at Departure Bay Elementary who are legacied (pursuant to recommendation 2) in 2025-26 may remain at Departure Bay until completion of elementary school.

Rationale: During the consultation it was pointed out by a number of impacted families that Departure Bay students are the only students that their secondary school is also impacted by the proposed shift in boundaries.

Without the additional recommendation students could end up transitioning from Departure Bay to Frank Ney (leaving the cohort of students slated to attend Wellington). They would then return to Wellington to attend with their sibling. This would result in students changing cohorts twice. This recommendation limits this transition. Staff anticipate that this will impact up to 5 students.

8. That the current Frank J. Ney bus route serving students in the Rutherford area be reallocated to the Oakridge/Golden Oaks area.

Rationale: Currently, these students are out of walk distance to Departure Bay and would also be out of walk distance to Frank J. Ney. The transportation department has determined that such a shift will be cost neutral. District staff may be able to serve secondary students going to Dover as

well. However, given transit is very effective to Dover from this neighbourhood it would not be guaranteed for secondary students.

This recommendation also responds to many of the concerns raised by Departure Bay parents with respect to their neighborhoods being shifted to Frank J. Ney.

9. That staff return by the November Board meeting to address the requests for minor catchment adjustments with recommendation for changes as appropriate.

Rationale: As previously reported, as impacted individuals reviewed the proposed catchment maps despite diligence in creating the catchments, there was the possibility that some anomalies could remain (e.g. roads or cul de sacs split, missing geographic barriers etc.) We received 73 submissions and still intend to bring together a small working group to review further and ensure fairness. However, it is felt that generally the recommendations can proceed to allow staff and families plan for September 2025.

We looked at each of the requests for address review and noted the majority were not based on potential geographic anomalies but rather safe walk routes, transportation, and mental health. The committee would review the remaining requests. We note a number of concerns related to the proposed changes that move some future students from Departure Bay to Cilaire. Given there is no recommendation to immediately move students in the new Cilaire catchment there is time for further review and revision as required.

10. That staff continue to prioritize Rutherford's active transportation plan with the City of Nanaimo.

While this recommendation was already anticipated it is important that the community can see the importance to the Board in making its decision. There were many concerns raised by impacted families that currently go to Randerson about crossing Hammond Bay Road. The plan to re-open Rutherford simply does not work without moving a number of Randerson students. Randerson is already turning away students for the 2024-25 school year. The goal is to ensure a safe and reliable walking route for these students which includes crossing Hammond Bay Road and we are confident that we can deliver this with our partners at the CON.

11. That District staff ensure sufficient human and financial resources to ensure student transition is done in the most supportive way for our families.

This recommendation is also something that is underway. Rutherford already has a principal assigned, and resources have been set aside to support impacted students. Similar to the active transportation recommendation this is intended to be responsive to concerns about the mental health impact on transitions. The District has successfully transitioned students with complex educational and emotional needs through boundary transitions before and staff are confident that they can create a positive environment where students are able to thrive in their new school.

Conclusion and next steps:

Valid concerns have been raised through the feedback process. Given the continued pressures on our schools, there is a general sense that the decision to reopen Rutherford Elementary is required. With the clear need for space in our schools (and the potential reallocation of portables to meet secondary

pressures) staff are not suggesting major changes to the initial recommendations. As a result of the consultation process however, five additional recommendations are being added to address the concerns that have been raised.

In the event that the Board approves the recommendations the next steps will be:

- Bring the working committee together to review requests for MINOR boundary shifts;
- Task staff with working with our Union partners to determine how staffing shifts will occur;
- Review final numbers in January for transfer;
- Staff review cross-boundary requests in March;
- Allow school administration to create a welcoming environment for our students and create an active transportation plan.

Appendix A: May 2024 Action Sheet

