

Carstairs Elementary School

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Background

The following responses have been arrived at using the best available data at this time. Please note that for the most part they are our best guesses and are subject to change due to a number of unpredictable variables. The intent of this FAQ is to give some clarity regarding future trends for Carstairs Elementary that it will lead to some solution focussed discussions in the near future.

1. What is the current population of Carstairs Elementary School?

As of September 6, 2013 the student population is 302.

What is the projected population for the next 3-5 years?

Based on recent trends we expect the population to grow to between 350 and 425 over the next 3-5 years.

What is the plan to attach modular classrooms?

At this stage we are considering a variety of options to address student population growth in the Carstairs area. While there have been discussions around this possibility, at the moment there are no formal plans to attach a modular to Carstairs Elementary in the Chinook's Edge capital plan.

How many do we have room for?

After a preliminary exploration, we believe that we can put two portables on the site if the Board wished to pursue that option.

What is the cost of each modular classroom?

According to Alberta Education, new portables can cost close to \$320,000 including not only the construction, but the movement and installation. The construction of the building itself, with just a classroom, is approximately \$150,000 while the movement and installation is approximately \$170,000. Used portables can be set up for considerably less if they are available. For example, to move the portable next to Hugh Sutherland, it could be done for approximately \$150,000 after all set up costs are finalized. A washroom might be needed as well, and that would add about \$65,000 to the cost (it is important to note that for any new portable or cost associated with moving a portable, the Board would be required to go through a public tendering process).

2. Will the portable classroom sitting behind Hugh Sutherland get moved to Carstairs Elementary? What is that cost?

Currently, the Board has not developed any plans to move the Hugh Sutherland School modular. Chinook's Edge has had engineers confirm that it is fit to move and there is a possibility that the cost of the move could be covered by Alberta Infrastructure. If the cost is not covered we would estimate the move to be approximately \$150,000. It is also important to note that the Board faces other growth pressures in other parts of the school division and will have to prioritize who gets this portable should they decide to move it.

3. If parents wanted to do special fundraisers to buy modular classrooms, would Chinook's Edge approve of those funds being used to buy modular classrooms?

If a community wanted to raise funds of this magnitude to meet a local need I am sure the Board would be interested. Communities themselves will know best if this is the most important place to direct their limited resources to raise funds. It is important to note, that by fundraising, a community may create a precedent where government is even less likely to support financing a portion of the cost of portables. A case in point would be playgrounds where all school communities now have to raise their own funds if they want a playground next to their new school. Additionally, as school communities add portables they tend to delay the pressure for government to

build new schools. As portables are added this can also lead to some aesthetic difficulties for the overall look of the facility.

4. How is Chinook's Edge working with the Town of Carstairs to solve this problem?

Chinook's Edge is working with the Town to identify an appropriate site for the next new school in Carstairs. Currently the Chinook's Edge Capital Plan includes an upper elementary school as a high priority for Carstairs and the division. Chinook's Edge and the Town of Carstairs have drafted a Joint Use Agreement that will support the sharing of both Town and Chinook's Edge facilities, including the new gym at Hugh Sutherland. We expect the members of this committee will play an important advisory role in the identification of a future school site. Those discussions with the Town and others are planned for this fall.

5. What spaces in Carstairs Elementary could be renovated to become classroom spaces? What would that cost?

The Superintendent would work with the Carstairs Elementary administration to determine the spaces in priority sequence. Once the spaces and the scope of the work is determined, the Facilities Department would cost out the options. Some possible areas to renovate and/or turn into new classroom space include, but are not limited to: the music room, the school library, the staff workroom, and the staff room.

6. Can we buy the Bob Clark Public Library from the Town of Carstairs? What would that cost?

It is our understanding that this particular library would have cost the Town in the neighborhood of \$1.5 million to build and as a result some form of compensation of that nature would be required. Given the likelihood of a significant cost, we have not pursued this possibility other than to see if we could increase our student access of the library to free up possible classroom space inside the Carstairs Elementary library should that become a priority.

7. Is Chinook's Edge committed to keeping the K-3 configuration of Carstairs Elementary School?

We are committed to providing the best possible learning environment for every student in the school division and that includes the Carstairs area. We also feel that the current grade configuration of Carstairs Elementary is working well and in our ideal world we would like to see that configuration continue. In the next few years, if some of our best estimates for enrolment come to fruition, we will be challenged to accommodate all of these students in one facility without creating a number of additional classroom spaces.

8. If the grade 3 students are kept at Carstairs Elementary, how long will it be before there is no room?

Based on current projection enrollments, one additional teaching space will be needed in 2014-2015 and another space for each year after that. While we are confident that we can create a few new classroom spaces if that is the will of the school community, it is important to note that it comes with some sacrifice. For example, when learning spaces like the music room, the library, the workroom and the staff room are converted to classroom spaces, it can place additional pressures on an already hard working staff and affect delivery of programs. We will also need to carefully consider if there is a point where the sacrifice of space and learning conditions outweigh the challenges associated with moving some students to an alternate location. With space available at Hugh Sutherland School, and a need to fill it to capacity before the Board can expect a new school, it will be difficult not to consider that as a long term possibility.

9. What is the limit to class sizes in a K-3 school?

While there is no formal limit we have consistently maintained very healthy class sizes at this level across the division. Schools are typically allocated about one teacher for every 20 students at the K-2 level and class sizes rarely exceed the low 20s. At the grade 3 level we try to keep them around 23-24 and rarely see them rise into the high 20s.

10. How long will it take to fill up Hugh Sutherland?

Hugh Sutherland typically grows by about 10 students per year as parents with students in grades 5-12 move into the area. This growth is augmented when the number of grade 4s coming in from the elementary school exceeds the number graduating from grade 12. As a result of both sources of growth, Hugh Sutherland is expected to increase its student population by about 30-40 students per year in the foreseeable future. With their current enrollment around 480, and their capacity at 755, this could take 5-8 years to reach a peak. As has been mentioned, with Hugh Sutherland at or above capacity the Board would be in a much better position to present a case for a new upper elementary school in Carstairs.

11. How long will it take to have a proposed new school approved?

New schools are approved by the Alberta Government. The timing depends on the needs, the economic climate, and the political will. Prior to building a new school, the Capital Planning Department in Alberta Education reviews every capital request and assesses the extent of the need. When they rank a request, they look at percentage utilization of the school, growth rates, and other spaces available in the community. The request is ranked against capital requests from other school boards across the province of Alberta. If both schools in Carstairs are filled to capacity in 5-8 years, and we add a minimum of 3 years for construction, our best guess for a new school being ready to serve the community is in the range of 8-11 years down the road.

Who do we write to or ask to meet so we move up the list quickly? Your local MLA is probably the most influential place to start.

Mr. Bruce Rowe
MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills

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If your call to your MLA is long distance, please dial 310-0000 then the area code and the phone number you would like to reach in order to receive toll free access.

12. What is the maximum number of students we can place in a classroom? According to Alberta Education regulations the maximum based on the size of the classrooms at Carstairs Elementary would be 40. In Chinook's Edge School Division we do not have any classes over 30 at the primary level (K-3) and have no intentions of going very far beyond our class size targets that we have sustained even in difficult financial times (19-20 for K-2 and 23-24 for grade 3).

13. Is there a point when the Elementary student population requires additional student washrooms? We are confident that for at least the next few years we will have more than enough washroom space to accommodate student needs even if we choose to create some additional classroom space within the building. Under current Alberta regulations for primary schools we have enough washroom space to accommodate 440 students (we currently have 302 students in Carstairs Elementary).

14. What is the grade configuration of a new school and where would it be located?

The Chinook's Edge Capital Plan includes a priority request for an upper elementary school for Carstairs. Once the building project is approved the Board reviews the enrollment and populates the school with the appropriate grades. The Town is expected to set aside some land in their plans for a new school, however at the moment a specific site has not yet been determined.