

## Community Consultation – Questions and Answers – Part Two (Published February 13, 2026)

### Additional Questions

1. You have noted an increased demand for mental health supports and a significant rise in students with designations across the district. If students are required to transition to a new school environment or if schools are combined, how has the district assessed the potential impact on student mental health and well-being?

We have done focus groups with students from Central and Collettsville. We have a process for referrals for counselling for students who are in need of support. Our staff and administrators also monitor mental health in our schools. Moreover, the Board has listened to the students when they say that being together as group and with their friends is most important for them.

2. If two schools are combined, how will the district ensure the needs of students with designations are met without increasing strain on school staff?

Supports are based on ratios in our collective agreement. Overall, student population determines the FTE for Student Support Teachers and the needs of the students determine the number of educational assistants. The larger the school (by population), the increased number of staff.

3. You have stated that the viability of the French Immersion (FIM) program depends on families continuing to choose it. Recent efforts to increase enrolment in FIM have resulted in higher Kindergarten registrations. Placing the program in a near-capacity dual-track school limits growth and can force a lottery even when demand is strong. Over time, restricting access in this way risks weakening the program rather than supporting its long-term viability. What measures will the district put in place to prevent capacity constraints at a dual-track school from limiting access to, or weakening, the French Immersion program over time?

French Immersion has had a number of years with low enrollment. As the smaller number of students make their way through the program there is plenty of room to accommodate new students. Overall, our student population is declining across our schools in Merritt, this includes English Programming. There would not be a lottery. We will offer French Immersion to all who want the program.

4. If the FIM program were to end due to declining enrolment, or if families withdrew from the program, would students from the Bench catchment return to their neighbourhood school, and would that school have sufficient capacity to accommodate them?

Yes. We have a larger class leaving Bench than the one coming in. We also have students out of catchment that would return to their neighbourhood school if space is needed. We also have another portable that can be used as a classroom as well.

5. If the FIM program were relocated to Diamond Vale, what would be the projected increase in busing time for students travelling:
  - from Central Elementary to Diamond Vale? It is 1.7 kms - google says 4 mins
  - from Collettsville Elementary to Diamond Vale? - It is 4 kms - google says 5 mins
  
6. If a school building were closed and leased or rented to a third party, who would be responsible for ongoing deferred maintenance costs during that period?

It depends on how the lease is structured. You can charge less for the monthly lease rate and make maintenance the responsibility of the tenant or charge more per month and the School District remains responsible for maintenance.

7. The district has cited 10-year deferred maintenance costs of approximately \$2.3 million for Central Elementary and \$1.1 million for Collettsville Elementary. How do these 10-year deferred maintenance costs being cited, compare to what the district has allocated and spent annually on maintenance over the past 10–15 years?

There are two pots of money. There are capital projects that we apply to Ministry to support that come outside of our annual budget. The electrical upgrade at Bench and the renovated science classrooms at MSS are examples.

We received \$833,000 for maintenance a year in our annual budget. These dollars are spent across all of our schools. We have deferred maintenance at all of our schools as shared in our community consultation Questions and Answers:

School	Cost
Merritt Central Elementary	\$2.3 million
Collettsville Elementary	\$1.1 million
Bench Elementary	\$577,000
Nicola Canford Elementary	\$630,500

Diamond Vale Elementary	\$695,000
Merritt Secondary School	\$2.1 million
John Allison Elementary School	\$870,000
Vermillion Forks Elementary School	\$689,000
Princeton Secondary School	\$591,000

8. Given the significant increase in both Trustee and Superintendent expenses in 2024/25 compared to prior years, how were these expenditures evaluated for necessity, and how do they align with the district's stated need for fiscal restraint?

Expenses for Trustees:

- 2019/20 - \$23,512
- 2020/21 - \$8,151
- 2021/22 - \$19,376.39
- 2022/23 - \$24,539.09
- 2023/24 - \$24,288.86
- 2024/25 - \$49,455.08

Superintendent Expenses:

- 2019/20 - \$14,839
- 2020/21 - \$2,340
- 2021/22 - \$8,012.92
- 2022/23 - \$14,033.38
- 2023/34 - \$10,111.00
- 2024/25 - \$35,753.23

There is an approval process each month for expenses that are submitted. They go to the supervisor for the approval. In addition, anything over \$5000 requires approval from the Board Chair. We also have a finance committee from the Board. We have an independent audit each year to ensure that we are in compliance with policy and legislation.

2020-2021 and 2021-2022 are artificially low due to Covid Restrictions and the impact of the flood. Most meetings were virtual. The cost of living including travel, hotels, and food has significantly increased.

The costs have risen for all. For example, the District used to supply \$1500 for DPAC representatives to attend the BCCPAC. The amount requested this year is \$3000 citing "rising costs of living."

9. Superintendent compensation increased by approximately 37% between 2019/20 and 2023/24. How were these increases evaluated and approved in relation to the district's longer-term financial outlook, particularly given that the district is now citing financial pressures that may lead to a school closure?

Superintendent Salary:

- 2019/ 20 - \$167,833
- 2020/ 21 - \$186,636
- 2021/ 22 - \$180,297.51
- 2022/ 23 - \$209,216.22
- 2023/24 - \$230,646.85

When you negotiate your contract as a Superintendent there are grids and salary ranges provided by BCSPEA. BCSPEA provides advice about the contracts. BCSPEA must also approve the contract for exempt staff. There was an 8 year pause on exempt staff salaries and the grids significantly increased when the pause was lifted to meet market conditions and as well as to reduce compression of the grids and salary ranges with the double digit increases that teachers had received. As wages rise it causes compression on the grids for Administrators and District Office Staff.

Like teachers, there are grids and salary ranges for exempt staff. As part of the Financial Transparency Act, salary ranges are posted in the job ads. Raises are performance based for administrators and exempt staff. All senior leadership positions have turned over in the past year and half. As the grids are substantially higher than in the past, exempt staff wages have increased.

Competition for exempt staff has significantly increased in the last five years with retirements. Other provinces are seeing similar trends. There were 13 new Superintendents in 2024-2025 alone. We continue to see retirements for both Secretary Treasurers and Superintendents this year.

10. Given that the district has identified excess space within existing schools, has the Board considered relocating some or all School Board Office functions into underutilized school facilities as a cost-saving alternative, and what analysis has been done on this option?

Yes, this was considered in the past prior to the flood. Our district office was significantly damaged during the flood and the Ministry paid for the repairs. To move to an underutilized building would require a significant renovation to create office space as well as house our transportation and maintenance facilities, which are part of our District office building. We currently rent out of spaces at Kengard, Riverside, and CMS that is not used by tech, SCIDES or CLC. We currently house our Literacy and Numeracy Coaches, Engagement Facilitators, and ELL teachers at Diamondvale for their office space.

Each year there is an independent audit that provides a management letter. This year the audit warned that with rising costs, even if our student population remained the same, we would need to cut an additional \$250,000 from our Budget. You can watch the Board Meeting from September 2025 to see his presentation. The Board used their reserves to continue to provide staffing and services that the student population no longer supported. However, the Board knew the reserves would not last forever. There is a plan in place to deal with declining reserves. However, the pace of declining enrollment has increased at a rate greater than the Ministry or District projected as a result, the budget can no longer rely on reserves to make up the shortfall.

11. Where do I find the School Closure Policy?

[6.50 Closure of Schools FINAL - June.11.2025.pdf](#)

Policy is linked above. On our website, click on the "Our District Tab," then on School District Policies," then Section 6. Closure of Schools policy is there.

12. How many students from Antko reserve (Cook's Ferry) members are going to schools in our district? Since the reserve is in our area are they being consulted and considered like the 5 communities of Upper Nicola, Lower Nicola, Coldwater, Shackan, Nooaitch?

We have 3 Cook's Ferry Students. They attend MSS. We do not have a Local Education Agreement with Cook's Ferry at this time. The First Nation decides if they want an LEA. As MSS parents, they were invited to the consultation meetings.

13. I would also like to ask if there are minutes gathered for each meeting and when they will be made available? I understand there are consultation engagement summaries provided but wondering if/when minutes around these meetings and debrief sessions after the meetings will be provided and posted on the website?

For our Fall Meetings, our PowerPoint is published as are the summaries from the table discussions. These are the minutes from the fall meetings.

Our Winter Meetings are group sessions. Our Executive Assistant was tasked with typing up the minutes. As we have already reduced staff at our office and the meetings were very long, it takes significant time to complete them. The minutes from the Winter Consultation meetings have now all been posted to our website.

14. Impact on French Immersion: Transitioning to a dual-track program into an established school will destabilize the French Immersion Program and diminish Collettsville's unique cultural environment. We need to gain clarity on the District's commitment to maintaining French education. What are the mitigation measures identified by the District that will support the maintenance of our currently thriving French Immersion Program? For example, what are the plans for welcoming an additional 100+ French Immersion Program students and teachers into Diamondvale? Will there be additional administrative support like a Vice Principal? Furthermore, how does the District plan to include the DPAC and/or PACs in the transition plan?

First of all, French Immersion will continue. It is a potential school closure process, not a program closure. This has been in our communications as well as shared at the consultation meetings. That said, French Immersion is dependent on enrollment. Some Collettsville parents have stated that they will withdraw from French Immersion if there is a school closure, either to return to their neighbourhood school or homeschooling. As a parent, this is their right and we respect their decisions making process. The Board is committed to keeping the French Immersion program as long numbers support the program.

Kindergarten enrollment last year was very concerning with only 6 students, so we were excited to see 15 students this year. We continue to have concerns around our Secondary French Immersion numbers as we continue to see attrition from the program. As a parent and PAC, advocating to parents about the importance of remaining committed to the program beyond the elementary years would be a very helpful support.

If there is a school closure, we will move students and staff as a whole as much as possible. This was the feedback that came from our fall consultation meetings. To retain the same number of teachers in French Immersion, the enrollment needs to support it. Otherwise, there will be transfers as per our collective agreement.

Collettsville originally existed as a dual track school and one parent even spoke to his experience at the Collettsville and stated it was a good experience when he attended as a student in the dual track environment. There will not be a Vice-Principal. Part of the cost savings are reducing administrative staff. However, we have heard from Collettsville parents how valued Mr. Sambrook is as both a principal and as an advocate for French Immersion. We will take this into consideration if a school closure proceeds. A school closure will trigger an administrative shuffle.

If a school closure proceeds, we will work with the PAC or PACS of the impacted schools as they are closer to the needs to support a transition. These efforts can be shared at DPAC.

The rationale provided to the decision makers for the potential school closure needs to outline an informed integration plan for both students and staff.

There seems to be confusion around who makes the decision for school closure. It is the Board who are the decision makers for school closure. Not the province, mayor and council, or Senior Admin. Stakeholders are consulted, as Mr. Swan articulated at the meeting **the final decision rests solely with the School Trustees as per the School Act.**

15. **Transparency and Data:** Transparency is essential for families to trust that all options have been thoroughly evaluated. Currently, based off several engagements that we have attended, parents and caregivers are not trustworthy of this process, nor do we believe that decision makers on the potential school closure have accurate data for informed decision making.

As the Trustees, are the decision makers, they have been provided with the information. This information has also been shared with Stakeholders, who are consulted. There has been transparency in the process. There were 16 consultation sessions. There are many variables at play with a potential school closure. We cannot give firm information until the decision is actually made and parents indicate whether they will continue in the French Immersion Program. As we have been repeatedly told that parents will withdraw and potentially go to homeschooling, our staffing is dependent on actual enrollment.

In addition, despite answering detailed questions and correcting misinformation consistently, we continue to see stakeholders, both at the consultation meetings and on social media providing misinformation and facts, this includes the online petition to delay the school closure.

In the end, we will adhere to the process and continue to present factual information. If our data changes, such as the economy improves or 150 students, as the Mayor suggests, move into our District in the fall the Board will make the necessary adjustments. The economic forecast from the Province does not support this scenario and the Board must build a budget based on the most accurate economic forecasts.

16. **Community Impact and Student Safety:** Has the Board fully considered the long-term cultural, educational, and safety implications of closing Collettsville and restructuring elementary schools? Without a comprehensive transition plan, vulnerable students—particularly those with special needs or at-risk backgrounds—face heightened challenges that could compromise their well-being and academic success.

The Board has considered the implications and addresses this at the public consultation meetings. A comprehensive transition plan cannot be built until a final decision is made. Our District has vast experience with transitioning students and there are plans for past school transitions and the flood. If students are transitioned, we will hold open houses, so that students and parents have the opportunity to tour facilities. While student safety was brought up as a concern, there is no data to support that any of our schools in the District are unsafe learning environments. Administrators at all of our elementary schools tour the school grounds prior to the start of the day. Unfortunately, Collettsville itself was the target of substantial vandalism with five windows broken and damage to the playground.

17. We find the reasoning provided during community engagements and on the online platform, highly problematic, as the options presented lack clarity, demonstrate inconsistencies, and create the perception of bias by disproportionately positioning the Collettsville French Immersion Program as the primary target for the potential school closure. Such an approach undermines trust in the decision-making process and raises serious concerns about fairness, transparency, and the equitable treatment of all schools within the District.

You are correct that bias is a perception. The French Immersion Program is not closing as we have repeatedly stated. The program remains in tact and moves as whole in the three

scenarios. This was feedback from our consultation meetings in the fall. If French Immersion is as valued as parents say, there should be no issue with the numbers holding. However, the conflict appears to be that French Immersion is only valued if housed at the Collettsville site. The Board has also heard that Collettsville is “the closest thing to a private school that Merritt has.” The Board has considered all of the information provided.

Equity is about treating all the same, not privileging one school or group over another. In the three scenarios presented, the students stay together.

18. We urge the District to prioritize stronger advocacy for provincial funding and implement safeguards to prevent further harm to our children and community, ensuring that every decision is made in the best interest of students—not for administrative convenience or personal gain.

During the last provincial election, the Trustees asked PACs and parents to reach out to candidates and the parties to properly fund public education, particularly in rural areas. We are not aware of any discussions Collettsville parents had with MLA Luck. If you have correspondence from MLA Luck when he was a candidate, the Board would be more than happy to discuss it further with him. The Province funds school districts mainly on a per capita basis with some slight adjustments for geographic factors. You will have noted in our presentation that high incidence students receive no additional funding, which is another area the Board has asked to be addressed through its Parent Associations. We can assure you that there is no administrative convenience or personal gain. Closing a school is a no-win option. But the Board does not have the luxury of not making hard decisions. The Board is putting the best of interests of all students across the District in their decision. The Board can choose to not close a school and supports and services will erode as the Board is legally required to pass a balanced budget.

19. How was ELL counted prior to 2025 as an increase from 2019 of 0 to 53 seems quite high?

Students were not being designated as ELL in 2019. As a result, the numbers are high. There is only 5 years of funding for ELL. The numbers will start to decline in 2027-2028.

20. How many counsellors does the District currently employ, and how are counselling services allocated across schools? How does this allocation align with current student needs, and how would those needs be affected by staffing reductions or by school consolidation?

We have 4.8 FTE for counseling across the district. Our required counselling ratio is 2.60 FTE. We have a primary and an intermediate counsellor for the five elementary schools in Merritt, our 0.8 counsellor covers all three schools in Princeton the remaining 2.0 FTE is housed at MSS. We maintain our counselling FTE despite budget cuts from last year.

As we have to go to non-enrolling positions first, we would lose two counsellors. We would have one counsellor for Elementary - Primary and Intermediate, instead of 2. We would lose FTE in Princeton, and the remainder would come out of MSS.

21. No details were provided regarding the use of CMS. Are the programs currently operating out of CMS using the entire facility? Are they all District-run programs? Is it possible for the District to operate partially from CMS and partially from another underutilized facility?

The Board passed a bylaw to consider declaring a number of properties surplus, prior to the flood in 2021, including the Board Office. The flood changed plans as the Board Office as well as Diamond Vale, MSS and Central were damaged during the Flood. The Ministry paid for the repairs, so the District Office stayed in its current location. It would be a poor use of finite dollars to retrofit an underutilized school.

For CMS - CLC, SCIDES and Tech take up the majority of the building. The remaining section is currently rented out to a Church group, which generates revenue.

Please use the link below to go to the minutes for each consultation meeting as questions and answers are part of the minutes. The minutes are listed by meeting location/schools (grey boxes)

[Potential School Closure Process | Nicola-Similkameen School District](#)