



South Shore Regional School Board

Recommendation from the School Options Committee for Big Tancook Elementary School

February 24, 2016

Introduction

The communities of Big and Little Tancook Islands are remote, semi-isolated, and logistically different than any rural mainland communities. There are obstacles and challenges that Islanders have learned to adapt to and live with because of our geographic location. There are also wonderful and magical aspects of island life that make living here well worth it. We have a unique lifestyle and any and all decisions made by others that affect us deserve great consideration. This is especially true of decisions that affect the welfare and education of our Islands' young children.

Schools Involved

Big Tancook Elementary School is part of the Forest Heights Family of Schools. This family of schools also includes Aspotogan Consolidated Elementary School, Chester District School, Chester Area Middle School, and New Ross Consolidated School.

School Options Committee Membership

The School Options Committee (SOC) is comprised of one School Advisory Council (SAC) member and two community representatives for Big Tancook Elementary School, and two SAC members and one community/business representative for Chester District School. The community/business representatives are not to be elected officials, parents of impacted students, or employees of the School Board. The SOC Members are:

- Hillary Dionne, SAC Chair for BTES
- Scott Webber, Community Rep for BTES
- Shelly Adams, Parent Rep for BTES
- Sarah Swinamer, SAC Chair for CDS
- Sue LeBlanc, Parent Rep for CDS
- Donna Larder, Community Rep for CDS

Gary Walker is the Facilitator and Cheryl Veinotte is the Recording Secretary.

Summary of Rationale to Review

In the SSRSB's Long Range Outlook, which was approved in October 2015, Board staff recommended that the governing Board initiate a school review for Big Tancook Elementary School. The building utilization rate in 2014/2015 was 8% and the enrolment was 4 students (SSRSB Long Range Outlook, 2015, p.106); the 2015-2016 school enrolment is two students; and enrolment registrations, as of February 23, indicate that one student has registered, and another is pending.

Mandate

The SOC's mandate consisted of two purposes:

1. Conduct a review, with public consultation, of Big Tancook Elementary School to make a recommendation whether or not the school will remain open.

2. Submit a Report and Recommendations to the School Board to inform the Board's final decision.

Meetings

- Meeting #1 – SOC Meeting on Friday, January 8, 2016, 2:30 p.m. aboard the William G. Ernst Ferry, while docked at the Chester wharf.
- Meeting #2 – SOC Meeting on Saturday, January 23, 2016, 10:00 a.m. aboard the William G. Ernst Ferry, while docked at the Chester wharf.
- Meeting #3 – Public Meeting on Tuesday, February 17, 2016, 12:00 p.m. at the Big Tancook Recreation Centre.
- Meeting #4 – SOC Meeting on Saturday, February 20, 2016, 10:00 a.m. aboard the William G. Ernst Ferry, while docked at the Chester wharf.

Variances from Provincial Policy

Due to the unique nature of the BTES review, Superintendent Geoff Cainen requested three variances to the provincial School Review Policy. All requests were approved, as follows:

1. Alter the membership make-up of the SOC, due to the availability of Island SAC members; which means the three representatives from BTES are one parent and two community members.
2. Rather than having three required public meetings, the SOC may proceed with only one.
3. The SOC has completed their work. There is no need to follow the work time period of 90-150 days.

Address Each Review Objective

There are three review objectives for the SOC's deliberation:

1. Consider facility utilization and operational costs when making recommendations.
2. Explore alternative solutions for providing education for Big Tancook students.
3. Determine whether Big Tancook Elementary School will be needed beyond the 2015-2016 school year.

The two scenarios considered are outlined below.

Scenario #1 – Status Quo: Keep Big Tancook Elementary School open and everything remains as is.

- **Pros:**
 - Island students can easily and safely get to school
 - School day is not compromised by any travel/travel time
 - Lots of one-on-one learning for the students
 - Students' education is not hindered by living on an island

- Public School Program is being delivered in an efficient manner
 - Students are not lacking in any programming needs
 - Staff at CAMS have repeatedly indicated that the Island students come well-equipped and fully prepared for middle school
 - Creative educational programming within the community for the students
 - Maintains a regular school day of 300 minutes per day
 - Older students help younger students (peer support and leadership)
 - Young students (grades primary to 5) have a reasonable number of hours in their school day (six, rather than eight or nine)
 - Absenteeism is minimized with the continuation of an Island school
 - The whole island is the classroom
 - No increase in costs for continuing to run the school
 - Student safety has never been an issue (i.e., no drugs or alcohol, no worry of strangers being in the area)
 - In the result of injury or illness, students can easily and quickly get to the comfort of their own home and family
 - Island parents can reach their children easily in an emergency situation.
 - Community inclusion; students stay in their own community
 - Potential to allow growth on the island and gives families with young children peace of mind knowing where their child's education will occur
 - New families will be more likely to move to the island if there is a school for their children there
 - Existing families and couples planning to start families will be more likely to remain on the island if their children can go to school there (and not have to consider relocating and finding new jobs)
 - A small piece of history will be preserved, as we have one of Canada's last operating one-room schools.
- **Cons:**
 - The committee cannot report on any disadvantages to the students of Big Tancook Elementary School by keeping the school open.
- **Requests:**
 - Live stream Chester District School presentations, special guests, etc. to Island students; could be considered part of transition to link them with their upcoming peers
 - Declare Big Tancook Elementary School as a Remote School by Necessity

Scenario #2 – Close Big Tancook Elementary School.

- **Pros:**

- The committee cannot report on any benefits to the students of Big Tancook Elementary School by closing the school.

- **Cons:**

- Wharves are not safe places for young children. Wharves are provincial loading zones for fuel, supplies, general cargo, lumber, and many hazardous materials. Garbage trucks, oil trucks, septic waste trucks, heavy machinery, cement trucks, fishing equipment, etc. are daily sights. Students would be going through this loading zone at the two busiest times of the day getting on and off the ferry; meaning they would be going through four times.
- In the event of an interruption in ferry services, for whatever reason, students are stranded in Chester and cannot get home. It is not the same as a bus breaking down.
 - There have even been instances where the ferry is broken down and does not return to the island at all until the next day or even later, leaving the students stranded in Chester overnight or longer.
- In the event of an unexpected, or even during a planned, early school closure, Island students are stranded in Chester and cannot get home until the next ferry run, which could be almost 2.5 hours or almost 5.5 hours
- Every-day plan for students who have to wait until the ferry docks in Chester; CDS dismisses at 1:52, but the ferry doesn't leave until 3:40; currently, the students "hang out" in the community
- Students in grades 6-12 currently have an emergency plan in place. It is not reasonable to have that same plan in place, nor is it likely to be age-appropriate, for students in grades primary to 5
- The learning time is not comparable – studies have proven that early morning is better for younger students than mid-late afternoon, and these students would lose over an hour of that valuable time, first thing in the morning, compared to making up that hour at the end of the school day.
- Students will have increased absences due to interruptions of ferry services
- Ferry is an emergency escape vehicle for the Islands and cannot always guarantee transportation of students
- The ferry day would be 8.25 hours (leaves at 8:00 and returns at 4:15), but the students' day is even longer – time to get to ferry from home, then from the ferry to the bus, and on to school (nine hours, from 7:30-4:30)
- Not only students of Big Tancook, also students at Little Tancook; they get on ferry at 7:45 and get back at 4:45 (including prep time, it would be a 9.5 hour day); easier for them to go to school on Big Tancook rather than Chester

- See ferry schedule below
- Ferry crew has a “Right to Refuse Passage” to children under the age of 12 who do not have adult accompaniment
- Young families may move, which will have a negative impact on the economy of the island, as well as potential up-and-comers
- Families could be either forced to home school or leave the island for education
- Students will lose time in their day due to ferry schedule or late ferry arrival (no fault of the students)
- There is the possibility of seasickness on the way to and from school.

Day	Departs Tancook	Departs Chester
Monday to Friday	6:00 am	7:00 am
	8:00 am	10:20 am
	1:30 pm	3:40 pm
	4:30 pm	5:30 pm
Friday Evening	6:30 pm	8:30 pm
	9:30 pm	11:00 pm
Saturday	9:00 am	1:00 pm
	6:00 pm	7:00 pm
Sunday & Holidays	9:00 am	10:00 am
	5:00 pm	6:00 pm

- **Demands and requests, in the event of school closure, to accommodate the needs of the Island students:**
 - Lost classroom instructional time, due to ferry schedule, must be recovered to ensure Island students receive 300 instructional minutes per day
 - Need 100% Teacher Assistant (TA) for the supervision of students while being transported on the ferry
 - Recommend to the Superintendent the creation of a training opportunity to take place on the Island, for island residents, who are eligible and interested to participate in substitute TA work, to ensure the availability of that position, in times when the permanent TA is unable to work
 - All students are to travel at the same time to and from Tancook and Chester
 - School-wide activities, such as assemblies and singing the National Anthem, must occur at times when all students have arrived at school
 - When students are unable to get to school due to an interruption in ferry services, there must be an opportunity for them to connect with their classroom via Skype, or some other format, to minimize missed learning time
 - Must have a suitable “sick room” at CDS to ensure student comfort in times of illness,

when they may have to wait for hours to get home on the ferry; must have appropriate supervision during such times

- Direct the School Board Chair to report back to the SOC when the Board has investigated all options and comes to a decision.
- Must be an emergency plan for when ferry cannot bring students back to the island (including health and safety of students)
- Arrangements must be in place for early dismissals due to inclement weather, parent-teacher, collaborative learning days, etc.

- **Alternatives to Education on the Island**

- Need to provide students with technology to assist them in the delivery of the PSP when student is unable to get to school due to an interruption in ferry services

Recommendation(s)

The SOC held three meetings, as well as one public meeting, to gather information and gain feedback to take into consideration when reviewing the options for Big Tancook Elementary School.

Student enrolment at Big Tancook will continue to be low; however, due to its geographical location, ease of access for families to have their children educated, and the safety of those children, closing the school does not have the best interests of Island students at the forefront.

It is the recommendation of the School Options Committee that the Board keep Big Tancook Elementary School open, and if this is not the decision of the elected School Board, our demands and requests should be considered for any student living on the islands of Tancook.

Closing Statement

We hope that the discussions we have had and the facts that we have presented will allow all of you to easily decide and vote for the scenario that makes the most sense for everyone involved in this review.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Hillary Dionne, on behalf of the School Options Committee for Big Tancook Elementary School

**South Shore Regional School Board
School Review 2015-2016
School Options Committee Meeting (BTES)
Friday, January 8, 2016
2:30 p.m.**

MINUTES

1. Introductions

Gary Walker, an outside party who is not an SSRSB employee, is the Facilitator for this review. Mr. Walker does not have voting rights on this Committee; his purpose is to facilitate the meetings and provide assistance when developing the report to the Board. He has over 35 years of experience in education and has facilitated numerous school reviews.

Cheryl Veinotte is the recording secretary.

The committee membership consists of:

- Hillary Dionne – SAC Chair, Big Tancook Elementary School
- Scott Webber – Community Rep, Big Tancook Elementary School
- Shelly Adams – Parent Rep, Big Tancook Elementary School
- Sarah Swinamer – SAC Chair, Chester District School
- Sue LeBlanc – Parent Rep, Chester District School
- Donna Larder – Community Rep, Chester District School

2. Opening Comments

Mr. Walker gave members an overview of the meeting process, noting that:

- Meetings will run during the time allotted; if agenda items remain, they will be brought to the next meeting;
- There will be no official breaks; members may excuse themselves when needed;
- All members are equal and have a voice;
- All information for and from the Committee will be made available to the public, via the School Board's website.

3. Contextualizing the Work/Review of the Terms of Reference

The Committee's objectives are to come up with recommendations based on the needs of the children in the community and to consider facility utilization. The mandate is to recommend whether or not Big Tancook Elementary School will remain open and explore alternative solutions to provide Tancook students with education. The SOC will submit a report to the Board detailing its recommendations and the Board will make the final decision by the end of March.

The Minutes of meetings will cover basic information and will not be a verbatim account of discussions. Minutes are not public until after the Committee's approval at the next meeting, after which they will be posted to the Board's website.

Due to the small size of the Committee, communication will be via email.

The Terms of Reference were briefly reviewed.

4. Elementary School Discussion

An informal gathering of islanders who came forward expressing ideas about the school and its future took place in the summer of 2015 in preparation for this review. Hillary Dionne handed out notes from that meeting and will send them to the recording secretary.

Discussion took place regarding the status of BTES. Some topics of note include:

1. To date, one student is registered for 2016-2017.
2. Would Board provide a teacher to homeschool student(s) on island, or help parents do the homeschooling?
3. Students are required to have 300 minutes of instruction per day.
4. There are many volunteers at Tancook who will need to be given an opportunity to help at school.
5. Someone on island just got their Bachelor of Education.

The two options for the school are:

Option 1 – Status Quo – Keep school open and everything remains as is.

Option 2 – Close School – How will Tancook students be educated?

Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative programming with community
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be either forced to homeschool or leave the island for education • Students board ferry at 8:00 a.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Long day for young children ○ No separation of elementary and middle level students ○ Will lose time in their day due to ferry schedule or late ferry arrival (no fault of the students) • CDES would require a sick room, with a bed and someone to care for Tancook students who cannot get home right away • Emergency plan for when ferry cannot bring students back to the island (including health and safety of students) • Every-day plan for students who have to wait until the ferry docks in Chester; CDS dismisses at 1:40, but the ferry doesn't leave until 3:40; currently, the students "hang out" in the community
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student(s) under 12 are required to have adult accompaniment on ferry to the mainland, as ferry crew is prohibited from providing child care. Would

	Board provide this, perhaps in the form of a teacher assistant? What would that person do for the rest of the day? What would happen on collaborative learning team days?
--	---

Brief discussion took place regarding what will happen to the building if Big Tancook Elementary School closes. Can it be used by the community? Who upkeeps? Who pays?

5. The Schedule

Regular SOC Meetings will take place as scheduled by the members. As per provincial policy, three public meetings must also occur.

6. Expectations of the Committee and the Staff

Expectations of the Committee are noted above in the Opening Comments. Staff are expected to provide information to the SOC when requested.

It was noted that public meetings and meetings with the Board will have to take the ferry schedule into consideration.

7. Role of the Chair

The Chair will:

- speak to the Board, when necessary, on behalf of the Committee
- develop agendas
- present the final report to the Board at a meeting in March

In addition, the Chair is responsible for ensuring that:

- the Committee follows the agenda
- norms are maintained
- correct decision-making procedures are followed

8. Establishing the Chair

Members agreed that Hillary Dionne will chair this Committee.

9. Questions/Comments

There were no additional questions or comments.

10. Adjourn

The date of the next meeting is to be determined.

The meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

**South Shore Regional School Board
School Review 2015-2016
School Options Committee Meeting (BTES)
Saturday, January 23, 2016
10:00 a.m.**

MINUTES

1. Record of Attendance

Hillary Dionne, Scott Webber, Shelly Adams, Sarah Swinamer, Sue LeBlanc, Donna Larder, Gary Walker, and Cheryl Veinotte were in attendance.

2. Scenarios for Big Tancook Elementary School

Discussion took place around the pros and cons of a potential school closure. At the SOC's January 8 meeting, Hillary Dionne, SOC Chair, provided a summary (Appendix A) of an informal gathering of Islanders who came forward in the summer of 2015 expressing ideas about the school and its future. In addition to reviewing this document, the following topics were discussed:

- The possibility of moving the student(s) to CDS, but not officially close the school, to allow for possible re-opening of the school with future growth on the Island.
 - This would typically not happen.
- If the school stays open,
 - Do classes have to happen Monday through Friday?
 - Yes – the Education Act says that students must be provided with 300 minutes of instruction per day
 - Does this apply to such a unique situation, where the students are getting much more one-on-one time with the teacher?
 - Yes – it is important to have a consistent learning environment.
 -
- If the school closes,
 - Must create normalcy for elementary students – they should be coming and going to school with the other Island students.
 - Must have a TA or another adult, as well as a substitute for that person, to supervise students on the ferry.
 - Arrangements must be in place for early dismissals due to inclement weather, parent-teacher, collaborative learning days, etc.
 - If families choose to keep their children home on scheduled early dismissal days due to the long stay before the ferry leaves, is it possible to video link to the classroom so they do not miss instructional time?

- Must have a suitable “sick room” at CDS to ensure student comfort in times of illness, when they may have to wait for hours to get home on the ferry; must have supervision during such times.

As of January 16, one student is registered for 2016-2017.

3. Next Meetings

The Public Meeting will take place at Big Tancook Island’s Recreation Centre on Wednesday, February 17, from 12:00-1:00 p.m. The purposes of this meeting are:

- a) Process
- b) Mandate
- c) Scenarios
- d) Questions

Due to the nature of the BTES review, Superintendent Geoff Cainen requested a variance to the School Review Policy. This variance was granted, so the Committee may proceed with only one public meeting.

The objective of the Committee’s attendance at the public meetings is to listen to the community speak and determine what information needs to be included in the scenarios.

Information regarding the public meetings is transparent, with notification going out to families and the community in numerous ways – email to all schools, ALERT (PowerSchool) to every student’s home, school newsletters, school websites, Board website, Board Facebook page, Board Twitter account, etc. It will be on the local radio stations and there will be an advertisement in a local newspaper about a week before the meeting.

Date of next SOC Meeting – February 20, 10:00 a.m.

4. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:35 p.m.

Pros and Cons of keeping the Tancook elementary school open

If the school remains open:

- New families will be more likely to move to the island if there's a school for their children here.
- Existing families and couples planning to start families will be more likely to remain on the island if their children can go to school here (and not have to consider relocating and finding new jobs).
- The education the children receive in this type of small-school environment has proven to be amazing; lots of one-on-one with the teacher, multi-grade lesson learning, older kids help younger kids, worry-free and stress-free school days, inclusive playtime and lesson time – no child is ever left out or left behind.
- Island children can *safely* travel to and from school.
- Island parents can reach their children easily in an emergency situation.
- In the event of our current teacher retiring, teaching at the island's school might be considered a dream job by many other teachers.
- Our island community will not become a retirement/seasonal community only.
- A small piece of history will be preserved, as we have one of Canada's last operating one-room schools.

If the school closes:

- Sending young children to school in Chester exposes them to the hazards of heavy freight being hoisted on and off the ferry as well as vehicular traffic on both wharves where it is often quite busy and visibility might not be the best.
- There is the possibility of seasickness on the way to and from school.
- The children would need an adult chaperone for both ferry crossings – it isn't fair to expect the island's middle and high school students to be responsible for them. Plus, the TA who will be traveling with our island's special needs student will already have her hands full with him alone.
- The elementary school in Chester commences at 8:00 AM and finishes at 1:40 PM. Our children would not get to school in Chester until 9:00 AM (if they took the 8:00 AM ferry) and would have to wait for 2 hours after school to catch the ferry home at 3:40 PM. In order for our elementary-aged kids to get to school in Chester on time they would have to catch the 6:00 AM ferry and then wait for an hour for school to begin.
*Our island school goes from 8:30 AM until 3:00 PM Monday to Thursday with Fridays being a half-day (9:00 AM – 12:00 PM).
- Families who cannot afford to move will likely be forced to homeschool.
- If families do move off the island so their children can safely and conveniently attend school, we will lose part of our ferry crew and part of our lobster fleet.

Other considerations

- Ours is a unique situation and conventional/existing solutions to closing a community school simply do not work here. We can't put our kids on a bus and safely transport them the extra kilometers to the next school.
- Is it healthy mentally/socially for the school to remain open for only one student & teacher? Could we implement a program where islanders with preschool aged toddlers spend some time at the school, accompanied by a parent, to interact with the student(s)? This would allow the teacher a break and it would socialize the students and toddlers. Could this program include the island's senior citizens as well?
- If the school closes is there a possibility of it re-opening when the island's existing toddlers are ready to start grade primary or if new families come to the island with elementary-aged children? Can community members keep and maintain the building so it would not be an expense to the school board until it re-opens?
- If the school closes would the school board send a teacher out to the island 2 or 3 times a week to help any parents who may have been forced to homeschool?
- The Chester District School cannot easily adjust its hours to accommodate a few island children and the Department of Transportation is not likely going to alter the existing ferry schedule, so what solution could we come up with to ensure our island children have a proper school day if they are forced to commute? An 8:00 AM to 4:15 PM school day is a very long one for young children, and how will they make up the 5+ school hours per week they will miss by taking the 8 AM ferry across and being late for school each day?
- What happens if a chaperone is hired to travel on the ferry with our children and the chaperone calls in sick? Would there be a substitute? Would the school board hire a chaperone from the island or the mainland? If it's someone from the mainland they would have to make 4 ferry crossings daily to accompany our children to and from school.
- Why not keep the island school open and hire a chaperone from the mainland and offer any interested Chester families the option of sending their elementary-aged children to school on the island?
 *I mentioned this during our last review (2008-2010) and the reply I got was, "Nobody in Chester would want to send their young children to school on the ferry"
- If our school closes what would our elementary-aged children do in the event of the ferry service being cancelled during their school day in Chester? What if it's over night? Where would our children go? It's not as traumatic or as much of an imposition for a 12-year-old to spend the night with a friend as it would be for a 5-year-old who wants to be home with their parents.
- As discussed during our last school review (2008-2010) the cost of operating the Tancook Elementary School was a non-issue. In our SOC binder in the BTES

Information Profile section, page 11, it states the operating costs as \$14,699. Our school building is in good repair and any maintenance is cosmetic.

- Island parents do not feel that their elementary-aged children are lacking in any programming being schooled here. We have community volunteers who do many things with the island's school children, including music and recorder lessons, on-island geocaching and birding field trips, snowshoeing, regular guest-speakers (RCMP, lobster fishers, medical and fire first responders, Buster the Bus, etc.) and lunch hour sports. In grade 6 the children can participate in more involved music, art and sports programs. And often the children who have been educated on Big Tancook go through middle school and high school on the honour roll.
- Another thing island parents would have to think about if their elementary-aged children were going to school in Chester are evening events like Christmas concerts which would require a family to spend the night on the mainland to attend.

Potential New Students:

- There are two more families relocating to Little Tancook this spring (March) who plan to put their children in school here. One child, Liam, is currently 6-years-old and will start grade 2 in 2016 and the other, Ianna who is currently 3-years-old, will be ready to start school in 2017. Ianna's mother questioned me about early enrollment, as she believes her daughter (currently in a Montessori school) will be ready to start primary in 2016 at the age of 4.
- I am waiting to hear back from the Zwicker family who own a home on Big Tancook but currently live in the Bridgewater area. They have two elementary-aged daughters and in October 2015 they spoke with me and mentioned that they would like to move permanently to the island (in April 2016) and if so would put their daughters in school here.

*As far as I know, the school/school board has not yet been contacted by any of these families.

Here is what we know:

- There are two children (Carson and Samuel) enrolled for the 2016/17 school year here, with two resident up-and-comers currently 3- (Joshua) and 2- (Connor) years-of-age.
- This is a safe, close-knit community for children; a true example of a village raising a child. We have never had any issues with drugs or alcohol at our school and we have never had issues with "stranger danger", security or the safety of our children.
- ***Our young children can travel safely to school here*** and parents can get to them quickly if necessary.

**South Shore Regional School Board
School Review 2015-2016
School Options Committee Meeting at Big Tancook Recreation Centre
Big Tancook Elementary School
Tuesday, February 17, 2016, 12:00 p.m.**

PUBLIC MEETING NOTES

Gary Walker introduced himself and explained that he was hired by the South Shore Regional School Board to facilitate the review of Big Tancook Elementary School. He explained that the review is happening at the request of School Board staff and the elected Board.

Mr. Walker reviewed the attached presentation (Appendix A) explaining the school review process and directives, as well as the mandate and objectives of the School Options Committee (SOC). He noted that this is a process that has been put into place by the province to allow the larger community to get involved, have a say, and give the public an opportunity to influence the Board's decision.

The SOC members were selected and at their first meeting, Hillary Dionne was selected as the Committee Chair. On behalf of the SOC, and with Mr. Walker's support, Ms. Dionne will present a recommendation to the Board of what the SOC thinks is in the best interests of the students.

If the SOC opts to recommend that the school remains open (Scenario 1), the presentation will have to include valid reasons as to why.

Scenario 2, which is to close school, will have to detail specific requirements and requests to the Board in order to meet the educational, as well as other, needs of the students, due to their unique situation involving ferry services. One example of student needs, other than the required 300 minutes of instructional time per day, would be a sick room, equipped with a bed and human support in times of injury or illness of a student.

The following information is a detail of the Question and Answer period for the public.

- What are the steps of the process?
 - Had a few meetings so far to come up with the details of what the SOC wants for the students of the island; the School Board will receive the SOC's Recommendation during a special Board Meeting on Wednesday, February 24, 3:00 p.m. at Chester District School; the eight-member Board will make a final decision at a later date; hope is that they will take our recommendation into consideration, fear is that they'll not; they have the right to take pieces of our recommendation; they can choose to agree with it, disagree with it, or change it.
- Is there a deadline?
 - Part of our recommendation will be to not have the decision extended to June 30 – we want to know as soon as possible, to be fair to Islanders; after the SOC submits their

recommendation, School Board staff will prepare a technical report indicating if they can do the things requested; then the Board will make a decision.

- On the assumption that the school closes and ten kids come to island, would they reopen the school?
 - It's never happened before, so they don't really know, but it will be included in the recommendation.
- What is the current cost of running the school?
 - \$14,699 for utilities and maintenance plus the teacher's wages.
- Result of last review?
 - School will run until 2020 or until there are less than three students, whichever came first.
- Cost of having a TA with the student?
 - \$24,000-ish.
 - Would have to have accommodation for TA in case the ferry isn't able to get back to the Island.
- Would the TA live in Chester?
 - Would like to have an Islander do this, because it would be more convenient for travel purposes.
- If child has to stay in Chester, what would the plan be?
 - Need special arrangements to stay with TA.
- What is the cost of a tutor?
 - This would not be applicable because the Education Act requires 300 minutes of instruction per day.
- Most rural communities are seeing a decline in population; the opposite is happening here. Over the past several years, there has been an increase of about 15%, as well as five or six new businesses. There is no reason to believe this trend won't continue. It makes sense to keep the school open, rather than closing it, only to have to re-open in a few years. It seems like it would cost more to hire a TA, have them travel with the students, and add the cost of recovering the lost instructional time.
 - The SOC talked about schools of necessity – what constitutes that? Maybe BTES should be one? If not, why? New Ross and Aspotogan are.
- Need to examine the possibility of school of necessity; School Board should be asked to make why it isn't one?
 - Need to link it to Scenario 1 as the Status Quo.
 - Want as much feedback as possible to sway the decision one way or the other; are we missing info for either scenario
- Seems like it would be cheaper to keep the school open, rather than put all of these extra supports in place to close the school.
 - Hiring a TA and the extra supports would not cost as much as the teacher working with 25 or so students, rather than one or two students.
- 7:30-4:00 is a long day for a young child; would be irritable and over-tired by the time they got home
- In emergency situations or during illness, children want their mom.
- Any input from Little Tancook?
 - Hillary spoke with the family who have a son starting in grade 2 in September; they used Big Tancook residents as emergency contacts; another family starting primary in 2017; and at least two new families coming as well.

- Enrolment will increase over the next few years.
 - Have to go by current student numbers registered.
 - Don't want a school to open and close from year to year.
- Why is it not appropriate to ask for a re-opening criteria, if they close the school?
 - We can ask for it in the recommendation.
- What about early dismissal days?
 - The TA would be responsible for the student(s).
- Will the Board Members have had the experience to spend a day on the Island?
 - Don't know. That would be up to them.
 - The elected governing Board makes the decision.
- Is there room for appendices?
 - Not sure, but will find out tonight.
 - It's the SOC's recommendation, so they should be able to add what they want.
- A useful appendix would be a statement from the ferry services about the rules around children being on the ferry and about operational concerns of the ferry.
- There is not much in place for unexpected early dismissals for the students that don't have anywhere to go.
 - This would have to be addressed by the Board.

Mr. Walker thanked everyone for coming. He requested that folks touch base with Hillary, before the next SOC meeting on Saturday morning, if they think of anything that might be helpful.

The meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

South Shore Regional School Board School Review of Big Tancook Elementary School

Public Meeting
February 17, 2016
Big Tancook Recreation Centre

Explanation of the School Review Process

- School Board staff presents a Recommendation to Review.
- School Board accepts recommendation to review.
- School Options Committee (SOC) is appointed according to a set of criteria.
- SOC begins meetings.

School Review Policy Directives

- School review is done as part of the long-range outlook required by the Education Act
- SOC Membership
- Facilitator Role
 - Facilitate Public meeting
 - Liaison between SOC and School Board
 - Assist SOC Chair with the report to the School Board

Mandate of the School Options Committee

- SOC will conduct a review of Big Tancook Elementary School.
- SOC will make a recommendation whether or not the school will remain open.
- SOC will submit a report and recommendation to the School Board that will inform the Board's final decision.

Review Objectives

- Consider facility utilization and operational costs when making the recommendation.
- Explore alternative solutions for providing education for Big Tancook students.
- Determine whether Big Tancook Elementary School will be needed beyond the 2015-16 school year.

Scenarios

1. Status Quo - The committee has this option to preserve the traditions for the Island. The committee feels that preserving the school as is may attract new families to the Island.
2. Close the school and provide the necessary changes to provide a safe environment for the student(s) to attend Chester District School.

- The second scenario has several conditions linked to it.
 - a) provide a TA/Monitor to travel on the ferry between the Island and the mainland.
 - b) due to travel times, make up for lost time with one-on-one tutoring for the early years of school.
 - c) use of technology to link the student with the school in times of non-attendance.
 - d) the School Board must provide the necessary options in times of student illness.

- e) recommend to the Superintendent the creation of a training opportunity for Island residents, who are interested and eligible, to participate in substitute TA work to ensure availability of the position.
- f) due to ferry scheduling, ensure that time requirements under the PSP are followed.
- g) Upon the board making a decision on Big Tancook Elementary School, direct the Superintendent to report back when all options have been investigated and addressed to the best of the School Board's ability.

Public Comments/Questions

**South Shore Regional School Board
School Review 2015-2016
School Options Committee Meeting (BTES)
Saturday, February 20, 2016
10:00 a.m.**

MINUTES

1. Record of Attendance

Hillary Dionne, Scott Webber, Sarah Swinamer, Sue LeBlanc, Donna Larder, Gary Walker, and Cheryl Veinotte were in attendance.

Regrets were received from Shelly Adams.

2. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

MOTION by Sue LeBlanc, seconded by Sarah Swinamer, to approve the Minutes of the Meetings held on January 8 and January 23, 2016.

Motion Carried

3. Recommendation to the Board

The Recommendation to the Board is a report that will include the following information:

- Introduction
- List of Schools Involved
- School Options Committee Membership
- Summary of Rationale to Review
- Mandate
- Review Objectives
- Meetings
- Variances from Provincial Policy
- Scenarios
- Recommendation(s)
- Closing Statement

The Board will assess the information in the SOC's Recommendation before making the final decision of this review. The SOC will request that the Superintendent write a Technical Report immediately, so as to give families plenty of time to plan for their children's next school year.

4. Update from February 17 Public Meeting

There are two items to discuss as a result of the Public Meeting:

- i. The Board Meeting that is scheduled for Wednesday, February 24, 3:00 p.m. at Chester District School is a special meeting for this Committee to present its Recommendation to the Board. This meeting will be open to the public. If Islanders

come to the meeting and need transportation to the school and back from the ferry, the Board will provide transportation.

- ii. Definition of School of Necessity – Ms. Dionne found information on the Board's website and learned that New Ross Consolidated School is considered a School By Necessity and Big Tancook Elementary School is considered a Remote School By Necessity. This information is in the Board's Long Range Outlook, which was last revised in June 2015.

Geoff Cainen, Superintendent, contacted Ms. Dionne and told her that it was a mistake and it never should have been typed for Big Tancook, that it was only for New Ross and that Big Tancook should have been listed as a Remote School. Mr. Cainen reminded Ms. Dionne about a meeting that took place at Forest Heights in June where it was noted that there were mistakes in the Long Range Outlook and the whole document needed to be reviewed again. He told her it was decided that the Board would wait until after the two reviews were complete before revising it.

In reference to New Ross, it is called a School By Necessity because if it closed, there would be students on a bus for 90 minutes each way to and from school.

Discussion took place regarding the term School By Necessity and the Committee feels that the length of time it takes students to get to and from school, as well as the length of time they are away from home for the day, should also be considered. By the time students leave their homes, walk to the wharf to take the ferry, and catch the bus from the ferry to get to the school, they can be in transit for 65-75 minutes. Also, their school-day is long, considering they would typically leave home by 7:45 a.m. and not return until approximately 4:45, making it a day of almost nine hours, which is significant, especially keeping in mind that they could be as young as four years old.

5. Scenarios for Big Tancook Elementary School

Scenario 1 – Big Tancook Elementary School remains open.

- Pros
 - Island students can easily and safely get to school
 - School day is not compromised by any travel/travel time
 - Students' education is not being hampered by being where they are
 - Public School Program is being delivered in an efficient manner to Island students
 - Students are not lacking in any programming needs
 - Staff at CAMS have repeatedly indicated that the Island students come well-equipped and fully prepared for middle school
 - Maintains a regular school day of 300 minutes per day
 - Young students (grades primary to 5) will have a reasonable number of hours in their school day (six, rather than 8-9)
 - Absenteeism is minimized with the continuation of an Island school

- The whole island is the classroom
 - No increase in costs for continuing to run the school
 - Student safety has never been an issue (i.e., no drugs or alcohol, no worry of strangers being in the area)
 - In the result of injury or illness, students can easily and quickly get to the comfort of their own home and family
 - Community inclusion; students stay in their own community
 - Potential to allow growth on the island and gives families with young children peace of mind knowing where their child's education will occur
- Cons
 - None
- Request
 - Livestream CDS presentations, special guests, etc. to Island students; could be considered part of transition to link them with their upcoming peers
 - Declare school as Remote School by Necessity

Note: The province is staffing schools based on utilization and the number of students; they only used to use the number of students; 75% is the optimal utilization for school in Nova Scotia; anything less will hurt the Board in terms of staffing; anything greater, the Board incurs more costs.

Scenario 2 – Big Tancook Elementary School closes.

- Pros
 - There are no benefits to students by closing the school.
- Cons
 - Wharves are not safe places for young children. Wharves are provincial loading zones for fuel, supplies, general cargo, lumber, and many hazardous materials. Garbage trucks, oil trucks, septic waste trucks, heavy machinery, cement trucks, fishing equipment, etc. are daily sights. Students would be going through this loading zone at the two busiest times of the day get on and off the ferry; meaning they would be going through four times.
 - In the event of an interruption in ferry services, for whatever reason, students are stranded in Chester and cannot get home. It is not the same as a bus breaking down.
 - In the event of an unexpected, or even during a planned, early school closure, Island students are stranded in Chester and cannot get home until the next ferry run, which could be almost 2.5 hours or almost 5.5 hours
 - Students in grades 6-12 currently have an emergency plan in place. It is not reasonable to have that same plan in place, nor is likely to be age-appropriate, for students in grades primary to 5

- The learning time is not comparable – studies have proven that early morning is better for younger students than mid-late afternoon, and these students would lose over an hour of that valuable time, first thing in the morning, compared to making up that hour at the end of the school day.
- Students will have increased absences due to interruptions of ferry services
- Ferry is an emergency escape vehicle for the Islands and cannot always guarantee transportation of students
- The ferry day would be 8.25 hours (leaves at 8:00 and returns at 4:15), but the students' day is even longer – time to get to ferry from home, then from the ferry to the bus, and on to school (nine hours, from 7:30-4:30)
- Not only students of Big Tancook, also students at Little Tancook; they get on ferry at 7:45 and get back at 4:45 (including prep time, it would be a 9.5 hour day); easier for them to go to school on Big Tancook rather than Chester
 - See ferry schedule below
- Ferry crew has a "Right to Refuse Passage" to children under the age of 12 who are not accompanied by a responsible adult
- Young families may move, which will have a negative impact on the economy of the island, as well as potential up-and-comers

Day	Departs Tancook	Departs Chester
Monday to Friday	6:00 am	7:00 am
	8:00 am	10:20 am
	1:30 pm	3:40 pm
	4:30 pm	5:30 pm
Friday Evening	6:30 pm	8:30 pm
	9:30 pm	11:00 pm
Saturday	9:00 am	1:00 pm
	6:00 pm	7:00 pm
Sunday & Holidays	9:00 am	10:00 am
	5:00 pm	6:00 pm

- Alternatives to Education on the Island
 - Need to provide students with technology to assist them in the delivery of the PSP when student is unable to get to school due to an interruption in ferry services
- Demands and requests, in the event of school closure, to accommodate the needs of the children
 - Need 100% Teacher Assistant (TA) for transportation of the students from the ferry to the bus and return
 - Recommend to the Superintendent the creation of a training opportunity to take place on the Island, for island residents, who are eligible and interested

to participate in substitute TA work, to ensure the availability of that position, in times when the permanent TA is unable to work

- All students are to travel at the same time to and from Chester
- Due to ferry schedule times, lost classroom instructional time will need to be recovered
- School-wide activities, such as the singing of the National Anthem and assemblies, must occur at times when all students have arrived at school
 - When students are unable to get to school due to an interruption in ferry services, there must be an opportunity for them to connect with their classroom via Skype, or some other format, to minimize missed learning time
- Must have a suitable “sick room” at CDS to ensure student comfort in times of illness, when they may have to wait for hours to get home on the ferry; must have supervision during such times.
- Direct the Superintendent to report back to the SOC when the Board has investigated all options and come to a decision

Notes:

- The Board may ask questions upon completion of the presentation of the SOC’s Recommendation.
- The SOC would like to request the Board do something as a “thank you” to Jason Keddy, the ferry’s Captain, and the crew (total of nine employees) for allowing the SOC to use the ferry as its venue for meeting.

6. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:50 p.m.