

BES/BJSHS Consultations (Feb 28, Mar 6, Mar 22)
Summary Analysis of Themes

Question #1 Stop/Start Times for Instruction

Theme: Safety and Parking Issues

All groups identified concerns about safety and parking issues related to increased traffic at school start and dismissal times. The assumption is that there will be more congestion with parent vehicles, student vehicles, buses, and children walking in the area. A recommendation is that discussion with the town about traffic control would be prudent. It was also suggested that the number of crossing guards and staff/student parking arrangements be considered.

Theme: Convenience for Parents

Participants in all groups said that it would be more convenient for parents if start and stop times at the schools were the same. Working parents would benefit by this change, in particular. One group anticipated that families with older students would need to make adjustments to the earlier bell times. Another pointed out that parents with a child in BJSHS and PVEC would have a one hour start time difference.

Theme: Before and After School Activities

Gym time and other extra-curricular activities were thought to be positively impacted by the change, for the most part. For the older students, finishing earlier would mean more time for after school practices and gym time. For the grades five and six students, new opportunities for extra-curricular activities could be offered. The earlier start to the school day for older students could have a negative impact on early help and morning gym time, however.

Theme: Impact on Older Students

There were some concerns expressed about the earlier school start presenting a challenge for older students. It was said that older students learn better later in the day, and that earlier routines would be difficult for late risers. An increase in the number of late students was anticipated. It was noted, however, that earlier bell times might be advantageous for students with after school jobs, and might provide more opportunity for homework after school.

Theme: Child Care Arrangements

Common bell times for both schools were anticipated to be both a challenge and an opportunity. The opportunity for siblings to walk together and for older siblings to look after younger siblings was seen as positive. However, elementary students taking the bus at the end of the day and arriving home before older siblings walking home presented a child care challenge. The need to alter babysitting and daycare arrangements also presented a challenge. Some parents expressed concern about cost increases for child care.

Theme: Transition

Both teachers and parents expressed concerned about the time required for transitioning changes. It was said that time would be required to figure out use of spaces, programming, and staffing. It would require time for teachers to transition programs and services for special needs students. There was hesitation about discussing re-configuration until a review of catchment areas was complete. A suggestion was made to wait until the high school students from BJSHS were established at Park View Learning Centre (2017/2018) before reconfiguration of BES and BJSHS students took effect.

Theme: Social and Cultural Mix

Throughout the consultations, a concern was identified about grade five students being placed with the older students. Many said they were too young, socially and emotionally, to be with the older students. Teachers said that grade-appropriate assemblies and other school events would be a good reason for keeping the grade fives with the elementary students and for the grade six students to be placed with the older grades. Although the majority of participants favoured the P-5, 6-9 scenario, both positive and negative aspects about separating the fives and sixes were mentioned. For example, it was said that friendship groups between the fives and sixes would be lost. It was also recognized that moving grade six students to the other school would provide grade fives with the opportunity for leadership at BES. Suggestions were made about physically separating the younger and older students at BJSHS by clustering classrooms into wings, and by scheduling different recess times.

Theme: Utilization

Many aspects of building utilization were raised by the grade re-configuration scenarios. It was said that space in the two schools would be more effectively utilized if some younger grades were moved to BJSHS. Spaces could be created in each school for collaboration and support services, for example. Playground space would be better utilized with students more evenly distributed between the schools. A question was raised about the need to upgrade BJSHS to accommodate younger students. It was also noted that filling either school to capacity would limit opportunities for later growth.

Theme: Programming

The majority of comments about programming opportunities offered by a revised grade configuration were positive. Younger students moved to BJSHS could potentially take part in band. They could experience the brilliant lab, learning commons and science labs. There was a concern expressed about the possibility that French Immersion at BES would be limited to one class. There were also questions about the continuation of the peer helping and reading programs. Related to programming are extra-curricular activities such as music and sports, the P-5, 6-9 scenario was thought to be positive in that it could potentially offer more extra-curricular activities for grade sixes.