

**Public Meeting to Consider the
Potential Closure of St. Mark School
January 19, 2012**

Transcription from audio disk

Jeff Bellinger:

I'd like to start tonight by introducing myself and then we'll get going, my name is Jeff Bellinger. I'm a consultant that the District has engaged to help with our proceedings tonight. I'll talk you little bit more about what's going to happen over the evening but I'd like to do first is call on Principal Krzak to lead us in a prayer to open our session tonight.

Bob Krzak:

Thank you very much. I'd like to welcome you this evening to St. Mark School for our public meeting to consider the potential closure of St. Mark School and I thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to join us this evening to help the decision-making process. If we could bow our heads in the presence of God, In the name of the father, Son and Holy Spirit, Heavenly Father, Bless us as we come together in your name. Send the spirit of Jesus into our hearts, to guide us in all our discussions for the good of all. Father, we ask this grace through Christ our Lord, Amen. Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Jeff:

Thank you very much. Well I'd like to wish you a warm session tonight that it's cold out and want to welcome you. It's nice to see all of you and thank you for being here. I knew it was getting colder over the last couple of days as I've seen the teenagers at the bus stops are actually buttoning up their jean jacket so you know it's cold at that point... So we thank you for coming here tonight.

This is an important meeting and we all understand that there's serious implications with what we're talking about tonight. The decision by the Board of Trustees to initiate the process of considering the closure of St. Mark School was not taken lightly. These are the toughest types of decisions our elected leaders are asked to make. I'd like to take a moment or two to introduce the members of the Board of Trustees who are with us this evening as well as our Superintendent. From Ward 71 Trustee Becky Kallal, the Vice Chair of our Board; from Ward 72 Trustee Larry Kowalczyk; Ward 73 Trustee Cindy Olsen; Ward 74 Trustee Debbie Engel, the Chair of our Board; Ward 75 Trustee John Acheson; from Ward 77 Trustee Laura Thibert; and our Superintendent, Joan Carr.

Parents, students, community members, tonight's meeting is all about you. We're here tonight to listen to you. In order to have a good discussion we're going to receive a presentation from the District with respect to what we're talking about tonight but really our main focus is being here to hear you. We're not making decisions tonight, I want to make that very clear. The trustees are here to listen to the information that you're providing, they're all ears tonight. They want to hear from you directly, they want to get a feeling for what the community is saying about the consideration to close the school. We'll have time at the end of our agenda tonight for you to ask questions but those questions will be directed towards the administration and they'll be giving you the answers as they see fit. This is not your one and only opportunity to

Speak on this issue tonight. You're more than encouraged to provide input over the next couple of weeks as we lead up to the decision. It's not your last chance tonight, this is your last formal opportunity in this type of session to do so but you're always welcome to contact the district, the trustees, or the administration and provide further information. We just wanted to let you know that you have a sense that's the way we're going to operate tonight. Before we go any further I just have some quick housekeeping for you, for those of you that are new to the school, there might be a few people in the community here, washrooms are just outside the door and you just turn to the right and there's men's and women's washrooms there. If the fire alarm goes off there's an exit there, an exit there, or the exit the way we came in... So just be aware of that. We don't want to send you out into the cold but it's important to know that in case of an emergency. I would imagine many of you have cell phones, some of you have cell phone games I'm sure you're playing. If you could just set them on quiet and that way we can, we won't be disturbing anybody as we go through tonight.

You've all picked up an agenda when you came in. I think it's... just quickly walk you through; your going to spend some time right now and in a moment hearing from the District in terms of that all the information that you need to have your deliberations tonight. We're going to give you lots of time in small groups at your table to work. There's a person at each one of the tables to help you go through a couple of questions that we'd like you to provide us some input on. We'll come back as a big group, we'll talk about that and then they'll be time for you to put some questions to the District. With that we'll aim to be out of here before nine o'clock, it's a cold evening, if we could get everybody home. There's lots of young people here tonight, I'm sure you want to get home quickly. So with that I'd like to introduce Boris Radyo, the Assistant Superintendent of Planning for the District, and Boris is going to give you some background on the information tonight.

Boris Radyo:

Well good evening everyone and thank you for attending this very important meeting to consider the future of St. Mark School. The first question I'm going to answer is why St. Mark School is being considered for closure. And second, after I review that information, I will review the information that was sent to all parents and community league presidents.

First, why is St. Mark School being considered for closure? The answer to this question has to do with low school enrollment that will very likely remain low and with fact that the large majority of junior high students living in the St. Mark attendance area choose to attend other schools. The St. Mark regular junior high attendance area consists of the entire St. Vincent elementary attendance area which serves the communities of Glenora, Grovenor, McQueen, North Glenora and Westmount. The entire St. Pius School elementary attendance area which serves the communities of Dovercourt, Inglewood, Prince Charles, Sherbrook and Woodcroft, and that portion of the Our Lady of Peace elementary attendance area which is bounded on the east by 149 Street, on the west by 156 Street, on the north by 111 Avenue and on the south by Stony Plain Rd, and that school serves the communities of Canora and High Park. The latest set of census data that is available is the 2009 municipal census. Using data from the 1999, 2005 and 2009 City of Edmonton censuses, we're able to show a trend in the number of children residing in the St. Mark communities by looking at children in the newborn to 4-year-old, 5 to 9, 10 to 14, and 15 to 19 age groups. The newborn to 4-year-olds show us the number of potential school age children and the 5 to 9, 10 to 14 and 15 to 19 year-old age groups show us the number of children that should be attending Edmonton schools. On average across Edmonton,

28% of the students living in the community are Catholic. For the St. Mark communities this average is slightly higher at 29%. All of the communities that make up the St. Mark attendance area have experienced declines in the number of newborn to 4 year-olds and school-aged children for the census period 1999 to 2009, the last census for which information is available at the neighborhood level. For example, in the Dovercourt community there were: 27 fewer 0 to 4 year-olds; 75 fewer 5 to 9 year-olds; 71 fewer 10 to 14 year-olds; and 37 fewer 15 to 19 year-olds than there were in 1999. That's 210 fewer newborn to 4 year-old children and school-age children in one community in 2009 than there were in 1999. As compared to 1999, in 2009 there were: 787 fewer newborn to 4 year-olds and school-age children residing in the St. Pius attendance area; 872 fewer newborn to 4 year-olds and school-age children residing in the St. Vincent attendance area; and 465 fewer in the two communities in the Our Lady of Peace attendance area. This is a total of 2,124 fewer newborn to 4 year-olds and school-age children. The percentage of Catholic families living in these communities is 29% on average; therefore, the number of Catholic newborn to 4 year-olds and school-age children is approximately 600 fewer.

Student enrollment at St. Mark School as of September 30 was 111 students. This consisted of 77 regular program students and 34 special-needs students in District programs. The number of regular program students in the school today is less than half of what it was just ten years ago. This chart shows historical enrollment at St. Mark School for the last 40 years. The kindergarten to grade 5 program was removed in 1985 due to low enrolment and the grade 6 program ended the next year. The Educational Experiences 1 Program was added in 1991, Educational Experiences 2 in 1999 and Knowledge and Employability, and Educational Experiences 3 in 2001. In 2009, the Knowledge and Employability Program began to be funded inclusively and was no longer considered a District program. The current enrollment at St. Mark is the lowest enrollment the school has experienced in more than 40 years.

When we look at regular program students by neighborhood, we see that the large majority of students are from the St. Pius X attendance area, 50 students of 58 in the regular program. The other eight students are from the Our Lady of Peace and St. Vincent attendance areas. Historically, very few if any, students in any given year have come to the school from the St. Vincent attendance area and more recently from the Our Lady of Peace attendance area. Nineteen regular program students are from outside the St. Mark attendance area. As of September 30, 2011, there were 213 Catholic junior high students (both regular and special needs) living in the St. Mark attendance area. Of these 213 students, 61 attend St. Mark School, the majority of the remaining 152 students attend St. Thomas More School, Holy Cross School or St. Rose School.

So, to summarize the factors related to enrollment at the school, St. Mark School is in an attendance area made up of communities that have a declining number of newborn to 4 year-olds and school-aged children as well as an attendance area where the majority of junior high students do not attend St. Mark School. These factors together have resulted in a current enrollment of 77 regular program students.

Edmonton Catholic Schools has undertaken a variety of initiatives to support enrollment here at St. Mark School and to promote the school and the surrounding community. Concern about low and declining enrollment was expressed to the school community in 2003. At this time, the school was supported to implement the Science and Technology focus program as a means of

attracting more students and to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate higher levels of knowledge and skills through hands-on Science and Technology labs, access to Science Fairs, Science Olympics and Robotics; \$25,000 was granted to the school in 2004 for implementation of this focus program. The Science and Technology Program as well as the Youth Apprenticeship Program, which began in 2007, have benefited from annual advertising paid for by the District in both the Edmonton Examiner and Western Catholic Reporter. As regular program school enrolment declined the school found it increasingly difficult to pay for the cost of two teachers per grade. This resulted in operating deficits: \$45,147 in 2004; and \$259,000 in 2007; \$100,000 in 2008; and \$100,000 in 2010 were allocated to the school from the school district as a means of coping with budget deficits. Total District financial support to St. Mark School over and above regular per student allocations for the period 2004 to 2011 have been \$529,455 plus the cost of advertising annually for the Science and Technology Academy and the Youth Apprenticeship Strategies program.

This last school year the District has paid for the following marketing for St. Mark School: mail drop of handbills delivered to every household in the attendance area; 50 posters distributed around schools, daycares, grocery stores, community leagues buildings and libraries; newspaper advertisements in the Edmonton Examiner; signs sent up on the roadway near the school; and 200 brochures distributed to all the feeder schools.

And the school itself has undertaken many activities to market the school. As you can see, recruitment and school marketing activities and initiatives by the school have been extensive. These have included visits to all of the feeder schools every year during which St. Mark School was promoted in a variety of ways. There have also been specific promotions of the Science and Technology program and the Youth Apprenticeship Strategies program as well as extensive advertising campaigns. The school has also organized a variety of incentives for grade 6 students to come to the school such as babysitting courses, orientation tours, tournaments and contests. This slide also details the many marketing initiatives that the school has undertaken just during the last school year.

This next section reviews the information that was sent to all parents at the end of November. The first issue has to do with the St. Mark attendance area should the school close. The St. Pius X elementary attendance area would be designated to one of either: Sir John Thompson, St. Edmund or St. Rose Junior High Schools. This decision will be made in consultation with parents. The St. Vincent Elementary School attendance area would be designated to the St. Rose Junior High School attendance area and that portion of the Our Lady of Peace elementary attendance area currently designated to St. Mark School would be designated to the St. Thomas More Junior High School attendance area.

This next section describes the impact on the attendance areas at other schools should St. Mark School close. If St. Mark were to close and students currently enrolled at St. Mark attended their newly designated school, Sir John Thompson enrollment would increase by 50 to 407 students, St. Edmund enrollment could increase by 50 to 684 students, or St. Rose enrollment increased by 54 to 431 students, and St. Thomas More would increase by 4 to 457 students. The relocation of the Educational Experiences 1 program to St. Cecilia would result in 9 more students in that school. Educational Experiences 2 to Our Lady of Mount Caramel would result in 16 more students in that school, and Educational Experiences 3 Special Needs District programs to St. Thomas More would result in 9 more students in that school.

This next section deals with the impact on student transportation should St. Mark School close. Students currently in grade 6 who attend St. Mark feeder schools, who live in the St. Mark attendance area, and who choose to attend their newly designated school will be provided with free bus passes for three years. As well, the current grade 7 and 8 students at St. Mark School, who reside in the St. Mark attendance area, will be provided free ETS or yellow school bus passes for up to two years if they choose to attend their newly designated junior high school. Because a large majority of regular program students reside in the St. Pius attendance area, a yellow bus route will be created within the St. Pius attendance area to transport these students to either: Sir John Thompson, St. Edmund School or St. Rose School. This map shows the route that would travel through the St. Pius X attendance area using addresses of students currently registered at St. Mark School and residing in the St. Pius attendance area. To Sir John Thompson, the ride time would be 45 minutes, to St. Edmund it's 47 minutes and to St. Rose the ride time would be 55 minutes one way.

This next section outlines the financial and educational implications if St. Mark School remains open. If St. Mark School remains open, the projected enrollment at the school for next school year would be 89 students in the regular program. The school would continue to offer all special-needs programs currently offered in the school. Programming options would continue to be limited, there would be few financial resources in the school and staffing in the regular program could be reduced if the school operates within its financial allocation. Fewer staff in the school results in difficulties for the staff in meeting the individual learning needs of students, collaborating to develop common plans and to create common student assessments. Supervision of students is spread among fewer staff in a small school and this limits the type of extracurricular program that can be offered. Fewer financial resources also limits what the school can purchase in terms of teaching and student resources and equipment. The budget for 77 regular program students and 34 special needs students, that's based on the current year enrollment, would be approximately \$1.4 million. The projected deficit for the school would be \$291,785. Approximately \$1.1 million would be required to meet the lifecycle replacement costs of the school building.

Now looking at the educational and financial impacts if St. Mark School were to close, the budget for St. Mark School includes revenues of \$1,420,873. If St. Mark School were to close, these per student allocations of \$1,420,873 would be available for use in other schools. Direct savings from the reduction of a principal, assistant principal, custodial and administrative staff amount to \$334,814. The financial impact of closing St. Mark would be the savings from the reduction of principal, assistant principal, custodial and administrative support staff amounts of \$334,814 and the deficit amount of \$289,786; this would be a total savings of \$624,600. Based on the 2006 Alberta Infrastructure audit of the facility's condition \$1,154,350 for upgrades at the school would not be necessary. Relocation of the Educational Experiences program 1 at St. Cecilia would require approximately \$220,000 in upgrades and renovations to St. Cecilia School. Relocation of the Educational Experiences 2 to Our Lady of Mount Caramel School would not require any upgrades as that school has an existing program. And relocation of the Educational Experiences 3 program to St. Thomas More School would require approximately \$220,000 in upgrades and renovations to St. Thomas More School. Currently Edmonton Student Health Integrated Partnership or ESHIP has a lease here at St. Mark School and these would remain in the school if the school were to close.

Edmonton Catholic Schools is also considering relocating the Fresh Start Northwest Alternative High School program from St. Andrew School to St. Mark School. Fresh Start High Schools are for high school students who are not attending a regular district high school and who need a smaller site, a flexible schedule and self-directed learning. Considering the educational impact, several factors affect a student's educational experience. Choice is an important component in a junior high school educational experience and in a larger school there is a greater choice of programming available to students. When numbers allow, a school can offer a selection of second languages, Career and Technology Studies modules, Fine Arts options and other opportunities that a small school could not offer because of limited staffing. Besides choice and options, the larger school would offer students a wide range of opportunities to pursue personal interests with their peer groups: clubs, sports, intramurals, leadership groups, social justice activities, community service opportunities, International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement programming, accelerated math and science and other programs.

To determine possible community impact Edmonton Catholic Schools Chairperson Debbie Engel has requested Edmonton City Council to provide a statement to the Board of Trustees as to the possible impact the closure may have on the community. This statement as well as any other feedback the Board receives will be considered by trustees. Mr. Bellinger previously spoke about opportunities for continued involvement in the school closure process and to allow for community input after this meeting. The Board of Trustees will be accepting and considering written submissions. Please mail your submissions to the address on the back of your program. Our District website also displays all the information that I showed you tonight and that was mailed to parents and there's a link on our website that allows you to respond through the web. Thank you and Mr. Bellinger will now take over.

Jeff:

Thank you very much Boris. Now is the time for you to have your say, we're going to do that at the tables that you're at. I see a number of people in the back. You obviously have the option of staying there or joining a table to have a discussion. We're going to spend some time with your facilitators at each of the tables. Spend some time getting your opinions across, answer the questions that are at hand and then I'll give you a bit of a time warning in a half hour or so and we'll come back as a big group. This is your time to have small group discussion on this subject. So with that I'll leave it to the small group facilitators to take over.

(After small group discussions)

Jeff:

We're looking for volunteers down here, there you go, there's a microphone right there...

Cecilia Fenrich:

Hello everyone, my name is Cecilia and I was sitting with community members from the area. Some people went through St. Mark's themselves, others had their children go through St. Mark, and others yet had their children go through Woodcroft but they live in the area. So the answer to Question #1: If this school was to remain open what can be done:

- They'd like to see it become a K-9 school because it's a good building, so put the K-6 back in.

- They'd like to see the attendance area enforced to keep the numbers up, they're not happy because they've already lost a school (Woodcroft) closed in 2008, they thought it was in 2008.
- They'd like to see less competition between schools so students felt like they could go to their neighborhood school.
- They would like to find out if the lease income of the school could be used to offset the expenses.
- They don't think Fresh Start should come in after St. Mark leaves, they think Fresh Start should be added to the school with the existing program to keep it open.
- And they think we should work with Edmonton Public schools to keep schools in the area open.

Question #2: If St. Mark were to close, comments about things:

- Young families will not move in the area if there are no schools.
- They think bussing for the junior high regular students is too long at 45 to 55 minutes one way and that regular students going outside their neighborhood to attend school is hard on the neighborhoods and it's not good for the kids.
- Special-needs students, it's very disruptive to move them around to different schools.
- There is a very negative impact on the emotions of the people in the community, they feel picked on. They say what if the leases don't work out, they're concerned that the building will be left empty and become an eyesore and they would like to see the \$1.5 million that will need to be spent to... that would be needed for the leasee's to upgrade the building for lease-hold spent now on the students not later on, on the leasee's.

Thank you very much.

Jeff:

Thank you very much...

Laurie Pelkie:

I was with the parents from St. Pius School. If St. Mark were to remain open, what suggestions would you have to make the school viable:

- One was to continue and inform everyone of the quality education that is here at St. Mark.
- Another one was a study of other junior high schools and what they are offering and what is appealing to the students that are going there and not coming to St. Mark.
- Suggestion to bus students in from other areas and also to have bussing for this particular area.
- Consider having the students at the school wear uniforms or same dress
- And consider different focus programs; for example: Language, Fine Arts, besides the Science and Technology, something that may have a broader appeal that may attract more students to the school.

With the second question: if St. Mark were to close what are your comments regarding the implementation plan:

- That consideration be given to parents regarding the boundaries for bus transportation; for example, to change the bus cutoff to 118 Avenue instead of 111 Avenue.
- And could there be dual catchment areas so that there could be a choice of school for the students.

- We had a similar concern about the length of the bus rides and we wanted some clarification about that.
- Clarification as well on the free transportation for current grade 6 students but nothing seems to be in place for the grade 5 students.
- Consider surveying the students regarding where students are interested in going to, and the kinds of programs they would be interested in
- And consideration for the grade 6's that don't want to be separated and what can be done to keep them together.
- And also consideration for the small school environment, that's an environment that best meets the needs of some students.

Jeff:

Thank you very much.

Barry Devlin:

From Central Office. Many of the points that we have, have already been said but I think it was important that... I'm with a parent group from St. Mark's that they would be heard again. To make the school more viable:

- To continue to market the school to produce students, we felt that was important.
- We need to encourage families in the area, okay... to send their kids to St. Mark's.
- And our Youth Apprenticeship program should be promoted at our partnership with NAIT. And with the boom in the trades, the YAS program with their Industrial Arts lab should be attracting more children from the city.
- We are exploring putting a Filipino Language program in the school and; to date, there is a good response from some Filipino families that could end up with 40 families having an interest.
- Thought maybe could find a wealthy patron or corporation
- The parents have supported the extracurricular programs of the funding from the parent society and the school is very good. And teachers are first rate and the educational component has not suffered.
- Funding on headcount may not be the best way to fund schools. The K&E and PAT results were off the charts, they were better than good.
- The school community spirit is still good although they did share the point that they thought they were a bit under the shadow because of the two-year closure process.
- The city is planning to develop Coronation Park and that could result in expanded community.
- And there is evidence that some schools in the past that were scheduled for closures but do not... manage to rebound and are now viable. St. Angela's and Archbishop MacDonald are two examples they put.
- They need more than two years is another item.
- If other programs are in the building, the question is don't the renovations still have to be done?

In point 2:

- they wanted to say that some families won't benefit from the bussing and some thought that it might take an effect on the number of kids in the Catholic system.

- The alternative schools are much longer or larger which doesn't make for better education and again there should be a variety of school sizes and lastly, long bus rides will have a negative impact on students.

Thank you.

Jeff:

Thank you very much.

Dave Zacharko:

From LSI and I'm with the parents from St. Mark School. If St Mark School were to remain open, which should be done:

- First one was to quit talking about closing the school every year because it scares people away.
- Another thing is that many went to many open houses and they loved this open house here so I think the open house is being delayed because of talks like this and these aren't fruitful.
- St. Mark might have a small amount of kids at risk but if we have kids in the severe range, might not get with the same attention if they moved to another school.
- Zoe, who is in grade 7 here, said she wants to stay and that she's enjoying it here even though she's not from the community. She travels a distance to get here.
- If this school could find a language program - Filipino, whether Tagalog could be considered, it would be wonderful. They were talking about the Youth Ministry and the Archdiocese for the parents who are learning language (English) from their kids here
- And they thought that the new immigrants - 1 out of 10 is an Asian immigrant and by teaching a language for the Asian community would be helpful.
- St. Pius is growing so if St. Mark were to close, what would happen to 1 of the 19 that chose to come here - what is their choice?

If it's not closing:

- We talked about Fresh Start as well ... can they share resources?
- They like a small setting and so would they have a choice of a school that they are going.
- Do we have information with respect to academic standards of other institutions or other schools they can move to?
- We could push the viability of the quality of academics here and.... just going to my notes trying to weed out what's already been said ...
- Edmonton Public has a moratorium on school closures was a comment that was made.

Thank you.

Jeff:

Thank you.

Monika Mazur-Kostura:

I work at Learning Services Innovations. I had a table of parents from other schools - St. Vincent, St. Mark and St. Martin. For the first question - what should be done to make the school viable:

- The first comment was the school is very viable, it's Catholic kids wanting to be together, we don't want a luxurious school, it's just more important to be within our community.

- One of the main ideas will be focused on was to have the Board rally for some focus programs at this school rather than outside schools
- And there was some sort of survey where parents were asked questions of people in the community and talk about the Filipino language culture program as well as a Christian Fine Arts program that would include things like Music and Iconography.
- And the other suggestion was why do we need to wait, why can't we have Fresh Start come here now? It's a big school and at one time there was an elementary junior high so why can't it be a junior high maybe Fresh Start program and have part of the building dedicated for the Fresh Start students and that would increase our population.

Question #2 - what are your comments regarding the implementation plan:

- Well one reaction was maybe our families will just have to go to the public system because there's schools that are close by and we want our families here.
- The other comment was for these kids to go to the other programs, the other schools, some of them have these tremendous programs like the Focus Academy, Hockey and Soccer and it's now within the reach for these children from St. Mark that they can't always afford it and if they can't afford it and it's right around them, it's painful and is there going to be opportunities for those kids to maybe get subsidized... registrations so they can participate in those academies that they're bragging about and yet some of the kids here can't access because of financial problems.
- Again, the comment about how the commitment about transportation for just... a few years but what about families that have kids who are in grade 4 or grade 5.
- And one of the other things was a concern because some of the schools have a reputation that their school is more academic and they're concerned about how the kids who have difficulties learning, are they going to be able to fit into those schools that have these strong reputations.

Jeff:

Thank you very much.

Marc Motut:

Human Resources Services. I'm representing a St. Mark parent (Amanda's mom). If St. Mark were to remain open what should be done to make the school viable:

- There is a discussion regarding offering a Fine Arts program that would provide students in the learning environment with many choices through Drama, Media, Art, Leadership, role playing.
- Develop confidence in this community and it would also perhaps allow some flexibility in staffing when it comes to extracurricular activities.
- Maybe they could all be within the Fine Arts program. There were a couple of comments already mentioned, maintaining the Knowledge and Employability's program, the Youth Apprenticeship program, the Educational Experience program, the facility supports the programming and it's a benefit to all students having those programs within the school and it reflects "Catch the Spirit" and the unique culture of the St. Mark community.

Question 2: If St. Mark were to close what are your comments regarding the implementation plan:

- First of all, Michelle indicated that she really appreciated the subsidy being offered for bussing but transportation is of a huge concern. Homework routines are disrupted,

family, extracurricular activities would be affected because the student arriving quite late after school as opposed to walking home from the school community.

- New school initiatives, pardon me, new schools initiate new friendships at a longer distance. Friends live in communities far away, we may lose our sense of community in our own neighborhood.
- And finally, a concern is the perception of St. Mark's students when they arrive at their new schools, how would they be treated, how would they be welcomed, would they be perceived as outsiders.

Jeff:

Thank you, sounds like you had a very good conversation for such a small, little group. Good on you.

Sean McGuinness:

Hi, I'm also from Human Resources Services. I'm serving the needs here of three grade 7 students of St. Mark and a set of parents. In terms of the making the school viable:

- Some repetition but I think it needs to be mentioned about expanding programs of choice, Fine Arts and Drama has been mentioned already.
- A mention of an accelerated core of Math and Science programs, similar to the program at St. Rose School.
- Sports academies were mentioned, and also an addition to that would be with the sports academies, existing schools that are bursting at the seams, thought of possibly moving some sports academy, whether it be baseball or soccer etc. to St. Mark School.
- Expanding the Science and Technology program that exists now, broadening the market, the advertising area.
- Also broadcasting the level of excellence that's been achieved here with the grade 9 students in their PAT results
- Of course, broadcasting the benefits of a small school environment and the level of achievement.
- And also the comment was trends do change with the possibility of families moving in here and the St. Pius enrollment also looked very encouraging that that could be still a foundation to build at St. Mark.

The implementation plan:

- Firstly, the bussing was disappointing, 45 to 55 minutes was too much time, maybe too big a route for one bus.
- Students, in particular, mentioned group projects, if you're working on a group project with students that are coming from very distant catchment areas such as Dovercourt to Castle Downs, certainly it makes it difficult for those group projects.
- Looking at the community services that are in this area: library, bus terminals, Space Science Center, Coronation Park that's due for an upgrade. It's a shame that there wouldn't be a junior high in this area of course, these facilities serve the students very well.
- And if St. Mark closes, the question would St. Pius be next because of families are shopping for homes and looking for schooling thinking there's no junior high maybe they also wouldn't be choosing this area which would also hurt St. Pius.

Thank you.

Jeff:

Thank you. I want to thank the students at that table. I got to listen to some of their conversation and they did very, very well. Go ahead...

Charolette Player:

At our group we had 3 parents from St. Mark school, one in particular drives her little one here from Morinville everyday and also an alumni, John, who graduated 2000-2001 out of St. Mark's. If St. Mark were to remain open, what should be done to make the school viable:

- First and foremost, offer free bus transportation to all students. If this were the case, it's appealing that many parents then would enroll their children in St. Mark and this is a feeling felt out in the community presently.
- We also agree with the fear factor, that the publicity right now is that St. Mark is likely going to close so therefore parents aren't even thinking of the possibility of enrolling their children in the school. So with that comment it was felt let's promote and communicate positive facts and stats about St. Mark's to dispel the fear factor and link that then to the revitalization of downtown which will also ultimately bring more families into the core of the City of Edmonton so that these families when moving in know about St. Mark and all of the great successes, etc.
- We also talked about, the group talked about a focus school, it was also mentioned Science and Technology, language programs would be another way to make the school very viable.

I believe everything else has been mentioned, then if St. Mark were to close what are your comments regarding implementation plan presented by the administration:

- Ultimately, again, yellow bus came up and it was felt that 55 minutes one way and another way was just too much and it was a "guesstimate" at best because of our winter weather that time could be increased considerably
- And also there was a lot of talk about the wonderful options that could be offered if, let's say, there was this bus ride, the other schools... would the children then be able to take part in any of these options, the students, they would be spending their time on the bus.
- The Youth Apprenticeship programs and all the great programs that have already being mentioned by other groups, perhaps, I'm just adding this on my own because the groups with the Youth Apprenticeship program which is an initiative of the school, I shouldn't call it a program it's an initiative. They just spoke so highly of it, they wanted... aren't these kinds of wonderful programs present at the other supposed schools that the students would be going as they felt that the staff here is so incredible and so in-tuned with the students that they develop their own particular initiatives and there is a worry that they went to another junior high this wouldn't be the case.

Do you feel that I represented, okay, thank you.

Jeff:

Have we heard from..., no I didn't think so...

Ron Chomyc:

Hi, I was at a table with the community residents, most of them long-time residents of the community 20-30 years. There was Ross who actually went to this school and now goes to Archbishop MacDonald and still lives in this community. Most of the comments have already

been discussed and so forth but for the first one, some of them that haven't, one of the comments was that:

- Why aren't we considering the most recent data, census data for the 2012 rather than data from 2009 when we're making these decisions. Stats Canada data will be available in February-March and the City of Edmonton data will be available in February, that's the data we should be using. This leads to the question if enrollment is increasing from 79 to 89 or thereabouts, why are we considering this when we could do a bit more work to increase the current enrollment further.
- Another one was that hasn't been mentioned before was why aren't we are lobbying and talking to developers and rental properties like Brentwood Homes and Brentwood Development just out of here. They are apparently leasing and renting to families who want to keep their children going to schools in this area.

So that's one avenue and there are some other areas that we could possibly pursue. I think the rest of them we had mentioned or they have been mentioned before was:

- More programming: Fine Arts, Bilingual and perhaps Filipino and so forth, and an IB program and so forth.

I think the rest of them have pretty well been mentioned. For the last question, what are the comments with the implementation plan and that's been mentioned before as well but:

- The ride time to alternate schools are far too long, it's one hour each way and that's just a bit too long for the small kids and of course when they are going these distances, by the time they get back they don't have an opportunity to be part of the extracurricular activities and so forth, that's also been mentioned.
- One of the things was moving children to Sir John Thompson, across the Yellowhead, causes some safety concerns to the parents. Not only across the Yellowhead but St. Albert Trail so there is that issue
- And one of the other things is where are the teachers from St. Mark going to go if this school closed?
- One of the major points that was made here was closing the school basically undermines the community efforts to revitalize this community. They are spending a lot of time on trying to revitalize it. It's been mentioned Coronation Park, walking trails, better lighting and so forth and closing the school just leaves a big hole in the revitalization effort.

I think the rest of them have pretty well been mentioned. Thank you.

Jeff:

Thank you very much. I want to thank the community members that came out, it's good to see you here, it's a fairly large contingent. So good on you to be here and contribute tonight. You bring an important perspective to us. Have we heard from everyone? Ok...

Corine Gannon:

I'm from Learning Services and I am representing a group of parent alumni who continue to live in the community. Our responses for #1 - Why St. Mark School should remain open are as follows:

- They believe that if the school was from kindergarten to grade 9 and offered before and after school... and child care and day care, that this certainly would increase enrollment in school.

- They also believe that if we did make stronger connections with the new immigrant families particularly Filipino families, they know of two kids who just enrolled last week
- Particularly affiliations with some of the various new immigrant organizations such as the Confucius Institute which is not far from here would also help increase enrollment in the school.
- They also raised the fact that enrollment in grade 7 does seem to be increasing. Current projections for next year are 89 and this year has been 77.
- Also because the parents know the school might close they do know of people in community that have chosen to go elsewhere, so this has impacted the grade 7 enrollment as well.
- And we all know that there is lots of redevelopment in Edmonton and that it is no doubt should have a ripple effect in this area, particularly with the airport.
- And they also agree that if Fresh Start were to move into the school that this no doubt would increase enrollment as well.

Question #2, comments regarding the implementation plan:

- Our table was concerned that it would be difficult to attract families to this neighborhood with no Catholic community school.
- They were concerned about the bus as well, 55 minutes is a long time for one way.
- They also felt badly for the kids that have committed to this school, those kids that have just enrolled in grades 7 and are eager and excited to continue their journey through grade 9 here at St. Mark School.
- They also wonder if a questionnaire was posted to the community asking if this school was to remain open and become a K-9 school with childcare, I wonder how many parents would express interest and be attracted to St. Mark School in the future.
- They too are concerned about the community itself and the relationships of the people in the community without this school being a community hub.
- And they also wonder about whether or not the kids moving to other schools would be welcomed.
- They wonder about the students from Fresh Start who may come to this school without a bus to take them to and from the area, if there would be loitering in the area and concerned about the vandalism.
- And they wonder as well, they know Aurora School, which is a private school in the area, that was looking for a school and they wonder if perhaps in the event that St. Mark did move that if the District would consider selling this school to Aurora School, if there were interest.
- They also have wondered that if indeed the school did relocate, if NAIT or another secondary institute would want to lease the space. Thank you.

Jeff:

Thank you.

Santo Saporito:

Good evening, my name is Santo Saporito from the School of Alternative Education. There is no doubt that the family that we sat with definitely did their homework. They highlighted and stressed many of the points that have been highlighted this evening. They are a committed family to the community, committed family to St. Mark's, strong advocates that they want to see their school remain open. Tricia, who is a mom, she is the chairperson at St. Mark's, St. Pius

and Oscar Romero, and a lot of the points that her and her husband made along with the kids have been highlighted here but I did want to stress that they do have a lot of confidence that a Filipino program here can work and can be very successful along with the additional programs such as Fine Arts entering this school... make the school and community more viable. Thank you.

Jeff:

Thank you very much. Every table got a chance? Yes, thank you. Just before we go on, I want to thank the people that facilitated the sessions of the small table, recorded, that's not an easy job and so thank you very much for your work. I'm going to remind you that it is homework and you need to hand it in before you leave the school tonight. If you just jot your name down on top of it and make sure that Lois gets it as you leave. This is quality information that you provided to us, we want to take it back and make sure that we summarize it properly and make sure that the Board of Trustees has that information when they're making their decision. That's why we're here.

Now I heard a couple of questions. I'm going to throw them out to Boris on your behalf but then I'm going to invite anyone else that has questions to come to one of the microphones and we're going to spend the next 20 minutes, 25 minutes making sure that that any questions that you have are addressed tonight. I thought I'd start off with, I heard this at several tables, are we sure that the population projections that were in the presentation are correct. We heard tonight that there is actually a projected increase next year to 89 and we just heard some information about can we wait for some more accurate, or not accurate, but more current data. Would that help us in our decision-making? So I'm going to throw that question to you Boris maybe you can speak about your forecast for enrollment.

Boris:

Thank you Jeff. Yes, we do see a small increase enrollment next year to possibly 89 students and that's because the current grade 9 class of 22 students is a very small class and based on the grade 6 class, that is currently at St. Pius, I believe it's around 30 students and we usually get between 75-85% of those students and then we get one or two students from each of St. Vincent or from Our Lady of Peace and then a number of students from outside the attendance area, it could be as high as 35 next year. That's quite an optimistic projection but past that, and that we don't see the enrollment getting much past 90 based on the enrollment we see at St. Pius and then the trends of students coming from St. Vincent and from Our Lady of Peace.

There was some mention about other census data. The federal census that was conducted in 2011 will not be released in 2012 but if it is, that would be the first time that ever happened with the federal census. And the only census data that we have to work with to make our student projections and enrollment projections by neighborhood is the 2009 City of Edmonton census. That is the most recent census data and there is absolutely no other census data available past 2009. Now do you want me to address the issue with outreach programs?

Jeff:

Pardon me?

Boris:

With outreach programs? The Fresh Start programs?

Jeff:

Yes, go ahead.

Boris:

That came up several times. We are considering relocating a Fresh Start program into this school should the school close. That program would have between 80 and 100 students, about six teachers and I think it would take at least half of the classroom space in the school. A Fresh Start program cannot be located in the same school, in the same building, as the regular program and I'm quoting from Alberta Education's Guide to Education which states "*outreach programs must be offered as a stand-alone facility separate from a building already in use as a school. This facility must meet Alberta Building Health and Safety Standards for school buildings*" and then the next sentence is about insurance. Alberta Education does not allow a Fresh Start program, so an alternative outreach program and a regular program in the same facility, so the two cannot be located at the same time in this building.

Jeff:

Thank you for clearing that up. Questions from you... things that you'd like to talk about, if you could just grab a microphone, we'd appreciate it so that everybody can hear the question.

Audience member:

Sorry, I'm just wondering why they can't be here in the building?

Boris:

That's an Alberta Education regulation. Alberta Education provides funding for all school boards for alternative programs throughout the province and that's their regulation. There is no reasoning behind it but that is the regulation.

Jeff:

Go ahead sir.

Audience member:

Darryl Lucas, Woodcroft community resident. I note that the Edmonton Separate School Board and the Edmonton Public School Board are moving in different directions with respect to school closures. This was mentioned earlier that the Edmonton Public School Board has placed a moratorium on school closures for the next couple of years so they can examine the impact of these closures on older established neighborhoods and my question is why wouldn't the Edmonton Separate School Board want to wait and see what the results of this data will be before they move forward with more school closures?

Boris:

That's a very difficult question to answer, I would say that it's a trustee decision and our trustees are aware of the moratorium that's been placed on school closure by Edmonton Public Schools. This is the second year of that moratorium so it will end at the end of this year and our trustees do not have such a moratorium in place.

Inaudible comments.....

Jeff:

What we're doing tonight is making sure that we hear what's coming from the community we respect that position, it's a very valid comment and it will be part of the information we put before the Board of Trustees when they make their decision. We appreciate that, thank you. Go ahead...

Audience member:

Hi, my name is Sue Huff and I'm a former trustee with the Edmonton Public School Board and running in the next provincial elections for this area and I want to go back to this idea that there are rules around where the outreach programs can and can't be and that they can't cohabitate. Would the trustees consider sending a letter asking why that rule is in place and asking if there are ways to get around it because I feel that that was mentioned many times in this room and if the rules are there for a reason then we should know the reason. And if it's not a good reason then we should challenge it and if there are ways to use separate entrances or create other barriers so that we can comply with the rule, if it is a good rule, but still respond to the community then I think that would be the most responsible way to go ahead.

Boris:

Thank you.

Same audience member:

So I pass it on to my colleagues on the Board.

Jeff:

Thank you very much, and certainly the trustees that are here tonight heard that comment and, again, we will include that in our consultation report. Hi there...

Audience member (student):

Hi, I'm Nadia, future student at St. Marks Junior High. If the school closes I may never get to see some of my friends again. I will have to move along with my sister, Kalyna. She is presently a student here. I would like to keep St. Mark's open because those who I wouldn't see again, if the school did close, wouldn't go here too. I will most likely get better grades. Plus, I hear from Kalyna that the teachers are amazing and the students are fun. Meeting others is my specialty. St. Marks is a small school, but to me it's big. Lots of students are lucky the school is open today. I want to be one of those students. Also, where would the students go for education? Most of them might have to move away. What would become of Woodcroft, Dovercourt, Sherbrooke, and all the other students' homes? They might become neighbourhoods for seniors. If you agree with me that St. Mark's should stay open then say, 'I'! (audience replied "I") Thank you for your time!"

Jeff:

Thank you very much. If you could do us a favor we would love... if the sheet you just read from, if you could leave it with us, we would like to include that in the information gathering tonight. Thank you very much. That's not easy to do in front of all these big people. Yes sir...

Audience member:

While we were looking at the data and the populations, one of the factors why we have less and less number of students at St. Mark's. Why the Board are not considering the factor of uncertainty that is... has created over the last meeting and they think this meeting will have an impact again, both internal and external... people outside of St. Mark's. So I think the uncertainty that was created over the last meeting of closure it must have an impact on the parents who would like to enroll their kids in grade 7 ...(inaudible).

Jeff:

Thank you very much. Boris any comment on that? We'll take that information. Ok, thank you.

Audience member (student):

I'm Skylar, I attend St. Mark's and I'm in grade 8. Ever since I joined this school my grades have gotten from 60% to honours. And this school means so much to me that I wouldn't want to see it close down. And I was reading and it said you gave St. Edmund over \$9 million for budget, why can't you spend some of that for our school to hire teachers so they don't have to take on all the options.

Jeff:

Thank you.

Audience member (student):

My name is Zoe. The reason that St. Mark has seen a drop in enrolment in the past few years is because of you, the Edmonton Catholic School Board. This is because you keep putting us down by saying every other year, that you want to close it; therefore changing any of the students' minds that were considering going there for junior high. St. Mark is a wonderful school because it has small class sizes thus the students get lots of one on one time with the teachers, hence better grades. So really all I am asking is that you leave St. Mark's alone for a few years and then see where they stand in enrolment. Give us a chance to get some good publicity; and I am sure we can do it if you stop giving us all the bad publicity. Since if you close St. Mark's the grade 7 and 8's will have to find a new school all over again, plus what about the grade 6's that want to come to St. Mark's? What are they going to do? Thanks.

Jeff:

Very well done, thank you. Go ahead sir.

Audience member:

Good evening. My name is Ross Hamilton former St. Mark student from 2006 to 2009, currently attending my last year at Archbishop MacDonald High. I have been hearing amazing stories from these young girls about how St. Mark has affected them. I thought we'd hear a former student's point... of a former student. When I was at St. Mark, I'm speechless on how to describe it... ironically describing it.... excellent Music program, excellent Science program and like the ... previously... you get to spend one on one with the teacher on subjects. And you get to discover abilities that you never even thought you had, like I even considered myself being a math student but after leaving here I was fluent in French and Social and if this school were to close down many students would

be denied the opportunity of venturing in new abilities, that they would never thought of gaining or coming into. Now if St. Mark were to close, I feel that it would have a negative impact on the student's going into and leaving into, and I feel or just felt by this, people in this room right now, that St. Mark should remain open towards future students coming in to this wonderful school for the benefits of Band, of Arts and Science as well as impacting their futures and other's futures in due time. Thank you.

Jeff:

Thank you. Go ahead.

Audience member:

My name is Cindy Nerling and I am wondering if we could look at the graph of enrollment over the past many, many years because if you look at that graph, it's like a roller coaster ride for St. Mark.

Jeff:

We're almost there... (getting the graph back on the screen)

Same Audience member:

Right there... if you look at that graph, it's like a roller coaster ride. It's had its ups and downs and I'm sure through the years of the lower enrollment back in 1987 with 127 students, I'm sure we were faced with the same problems at that particular point in time as well, and I'm sure there were many suggestions as to how to keep this school going and I'm sure with the spirit that we have here at St. Mark, I'm sure we can come up with a plausible way to keep this school open and keep it vibrant because the student body here is very vibrant. And just from looking at that graph I'm sure we can find a way to keep this school open for the kids... it's for the kids. We have to think about the kids.

Jeff:

Thank you very much and that's an important point you're making. That's the graph we need to make sure the trustee's see. Ok, thank you. Go ahead.

Audience member:

Hi, my name is Nichol and my son is a grade 8 student here. The point was made in your presentation that because this is a small school that the students don't have access to the same sorts of extracurricular activities that they would at a larger school and I don't think this is true. The parent's council supports the students here: the clubs, the sports groups, the options that are available. We support them with funding from the casinos that we work. The kids do an awful lot of things considering on how small the school is. There is a Band program that's second to none, they go to camp together, the Outdoor Education program participates in River Watch. We helped to fund all the field trips. The kids in the YAS program participate in the CO² car races that's put on by the Engineering students at the U of A and the NAIT Cardboard Boat Races and frankly we beat out a lot of the larger, better equipped, better funded schools. So the kids here aren't suffering at all. And if they're being bussed to schools, and they have to get back on that bus at 3:15, how are they going to participate in the extracurricular programs that the larger schools offer?

Jeff:

Thank you very much. I would be remiss if I didn't point out the fact that here is somebody that is talking about the contributions that the parent council has made. You often do a lot of work without any "Thank You's" so thank you tonight. Go ahead.

Audience member:

I don't have a question Boris, I just have a comment. I'm both Chair at St. Mark and St. Pius and we at St. Mark want the trustees to take into fact that we do have a small school but it's a safe school, we have wonderful staff here. We have an awesome YAS program, our EE students are special kids and we'd hate to see them moved to different schools and it will cost a lot to run their programs at these other schools. Our students, all PAT scores are off the charts, you can't negotiate those... they are high. We wanted you to really take a look at the material we are sending and there are other parents that have done graphs and all these kinds of things that will be presented to you as well as our students are sending in things that we really hope you take a chance to look at and read over. Our students took a lot of work to do it. Our St. Pius families want to remind you of the impact on that school. If we're looking at St. Ed's, it's K-9, we'll have a lot of kids come out of St. Pius to go with their families to a K-9 school so it's going to impact our feeder school. And the very last point we wanted to make is that Catholic schools shouldn't be about profit, it shouldn't be about dollars and cents, it needs to be about kids, and giving our students a safe environment for them to learn and to grow in. Thanks.

Jeff:

That may be our... oh, one more question? I thought it was such a nice way to finish but go ahead.

Audience member:

Hi, my name is Laura and I'm not afraid to get up in front of a "mic" so there is a group of about 20 families that we've been meeting regularly since November because we are very, very passionate about the decision that you made to consider to close our school. So they asked me to share a little bit and we are preparing quite a comprehensive report that we are going to submit Boris.

Jeff:

Thank you.

Same audience member:

..... and each one of our comments we found that we feel are an important are actually backed up by a document and there will be like a photocopy of the front page of the document going alongside the sentences or the numbers that are stated in those documents so we don't feel that we're misleading. We're using things like Capital Health research and things like that. And one of the things that, using old stats, and I think that I really want to be able to speak on behalf of everyone in our group anyway that we live in this area and I've lived in this area 15 years, some people have lived too. But 15 years ago my son was born and he graduated from here last year. I was the only mom on the block with a stroller, absolutely the only mom. I had to go halfway across

town for Moms and Tots programs. We live here now and the Westmount area now is totally changed from where it was 5 years ago, 2 years ago. If you drive through Dovercourt, how many of you can count Newfoundland license plates on the cars. And everyone in those Newfoundland families, and I don't mean to pick on you, they have brought 2, 3, 4 children along with them and I have a school bus that comes down my block this year and I haven't seen a school bus down my block in 15 years and it's because there is children on my block getting picked up to go to elementary school. I have infants on both sides of me. When I moved in 15 years ago I got invited to the Sew and Crow with my neighbours. That was for all the seniors who were still sewing and knitting and now, you know, I get to sell Girl Guide cookies on my block and I can't even go five houses without selling out. We as residents, we experience... the library is busy, there is kids, Westmount Shopping Center has never had more cars parked there at all times of the day. Go there on a Saturday when families are shopping and buying their groceries. We have larger soccer programs in our community leagues. We have an increased baseball program in High Park, we have Girl Guides, we have 75 of them in this area, 5 years ago we had none. Actually half the grade 5 class at St. Pius is my Guide group. We got Superstore, we're getting Walmart at Westmount. Walmart doesn't move into neighbourhoods where there isn't young families. I was talking to some candidates who are going door-to-door, so I don't mean to ignore you guys over here, but they're knocking on doors and three out of four have young families behind those doors. They're not teenagers, sorry Boris. They are going to be two years before they come but what can the school board do for two to five years? Find us, help us... help us set up a specialty program whether it be Filipino, Fine Arts, if there was a language in Newfoundland that was different, we could start up a Newfoundland Language program. But we know, we just feel it, the energy is here and the other thing is that I recently located, and this might be useful for planning and your trustees. I kind of accidentally tripped over it, there is an Alberta Health website that does projections for populations of the similar age categories that the city census documents... that you use and the Edmonton area in five years... this is going by their little formula and putting it all in, is expected to have 18,500 more 10 to 14 year-olds in 2017 than we have in 2011. Now if one quarter of those are coming into our Edmonton Catholic schools that's roughly 4500. So do we have the capacity if we lose a junior high? Do we have the capacity to pick up those 4500 extra junior high kids? And can we not find a way that over the short-term we keep our school open, we supplement it with a language program and that in 15 years, when all those big schools start going down low again, we kind of just ride the wave and you just move them back and forth. There is no reason why a French Immersion program has to be in the same school for 35 years. You know, let's be flexible, move the programs around and make it so that the service of our education is still available to everyone because we're Catholic tax payers and we really like to be able to choose a neighbourhood that fits our social economic need and still be able to participate with our faith and our school rather than be given a decision about possibly... just hang up the towel and go to the public system because we can't bus or we can't walk. Thank you for my passionate plea. Thank you.

Jeff:

Well, thank you very much and thank your group that you're working with for working hard together and if I understood correctly you have more information coming to Boris, so we'll look (forward) to that. ...Girls we're going to let you finish it off tonight. Ok...

Audience members (two students):

Hi, I'm Shayleen and this is Morgan. We wanted to say that we really wanted this school and if this one closed down and if I go to this school and then it closes down, this would be my second time having a school closed down on me and I don't want that again. Thanks.

Jeff:

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for being here, we very much appreciate it. I end up doing a lot of meetings in the community and it was... is a very positive meeting. It's a tough issue that you're dealing with but you came here and you made your points. We've heard them, our job now is to take them, the information that you saw presented, combine that with the community input that you're giving us. And the information that we'll gather over the next couple of weeks from you, we appreciate it and encourage other people to get in touch with us. Thank you for coming, drive home safely. Thank you trustees for being here tonight, thank you very much.

End of transcription (1 hour 21 min 59 sec)