

| Edmonton Catholic Schools |

# What We Heard

| St. Thomas Aquinas Space for Students Engagement |

## 1. Background

St. Thomas Aquinas (STA) Catholic Elementary/Junior High School is dealing with exceptional enrolment and the current number of students is greater than what the school was built for. Edmonton Catholic Schools is looking for alternative options to continue to allow the students of STA to have access to a quality learning environment.

On Monday, November 6, 2023, ECSD had an in-person engagement regarding student space options at St. Thomas Aquinas. About 27 people attended from the school community.

There was a presentation on the three options being considered and details of the next steps, which included an online survey. Following the presentation, officials from Transportation and Educational Planning answered questions and listened to feedback from the community. The in-person engagement lasted 90 minutes.

The online survey was open from November 6, 2023, to the end of day November 21, 2023.

## 2. Engagement Objectives

ECSD is committed to successful public participation, which includes sharing information and letting stakeholder voices be heard, with the commitment that stakeholder feedback will be considered before a final decision is made. Each opinion, idea, and voice is valued through this process.

The objective of the public participation process at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Elementary School was to provide information to families and present three options that are being considered as a temporary solution to the space constraints the school is currently facing. Additionally, following the public participation session, families were invited to complete an online survey to provide their feedback on the options presented.

The feedback gathered by the public participation process will be used by Educational Planning in deciding on how best to accommodate students at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Elementary/Junior High School and the surrounding communities. The Educational Planning Superintendent and school administration will use the feedback from the in-person session and the survey to make the final decision on how to accommodate students at the school.

## 3. Engagement Process

The St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Elementary/Junior High School programming engagement process utilized two engagement techniques in the public participation process. They were:

1. an information session and informal question and answer session with subject matter experts on November 6, 2023, and
2. a survey, which was open from November 6, 2023, to November 21, 2023.

## In-Person Information Session with Families

ECSD invited the families of St. Thomas Aquinas to register to attend the in-person information evening on November 6, 2023, from 6:00 PM-7:00 PM. The objective of the meeting was to provide further information and options on what ECSD was proposing to address the space constraints STA is currently facing.

The presentation provided background on what ECSD has done to date to accommodate the growing enrolment numbers, an explanation of how modulars are awarded by the province and that ECSD has requested an additional four modulars for Sept 2024, as well as an overview of the three options the Division has developed to affect change on the school enrolment starting in the 2024-2025 school year. It was explained to the families attending that even if the additional four modulars are approved, STA's enrolment still exceeds the school's capacity and further measures must be taken. Additionally, families were advised that this is a temporary change until a new school in Cavanaugh is approved, built, and opened.

The three options presented to families were:

1. STA becomes Kindergarten to Grade 8. Grade nine students are redesignated to Father Michael McCaffery High School which is opening in September 2024.
2. STA is Grades 1 to 9. Kindergarten students go to St. Teresa Catholic Elementary School.
3. STA becomes a Grade 1 to 8 school with both the Kindergarten students and the Grade 9 students redesignated. Kindergarten would go to St. Teresa and the Grade 9 students would go to Father Michael McCaffery High School.

At the end of the presentation, attendees were asked to write to their MLA and the Minister of Education to share the impact that the exceptional enrolment at STA has had on their families and to request the provincial government approve the new school in Cavanaugh.

Following the presentation, attendees participated in an informal session where they had the opportunity to ask questions of Division Planners, the Transportation Manager, and the Educational Planning Superintendent. At the end of the engagement, attendees were asked to complete an online survey. The survey remained open until November 21, 2021.

Additionally, information and the presentation were posted to the ECSD and school's websites so that anyone not able to attend in person on November 6, 2023, would be able to understand the background before completing the survey.

## Survey

The online survey was sent out to all St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Elementary/Junior High School families and was open two weeks. The survey was distributed by the school principal using Swift. Additionally, the survey was posted on the ECSD website and pushed to the front page of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Elementary/Junior High School's webpage.

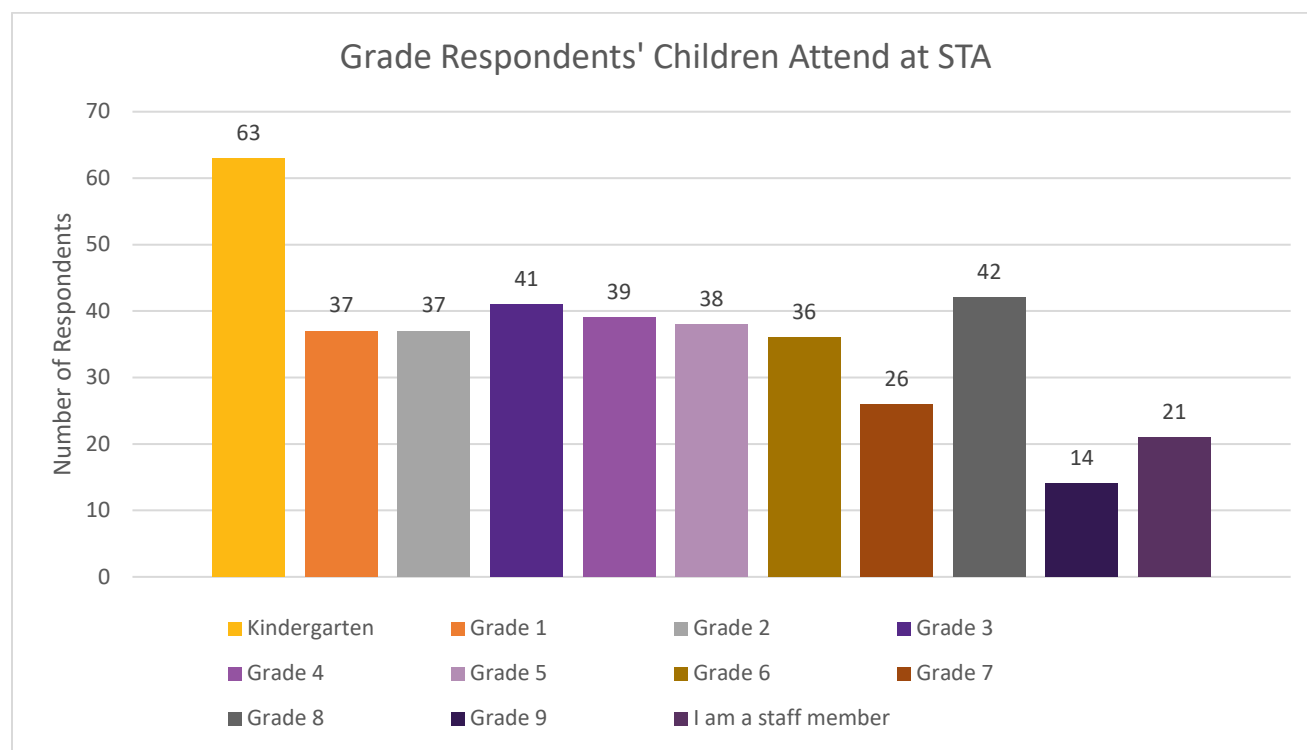
## 4. Engagement Results

### Survey

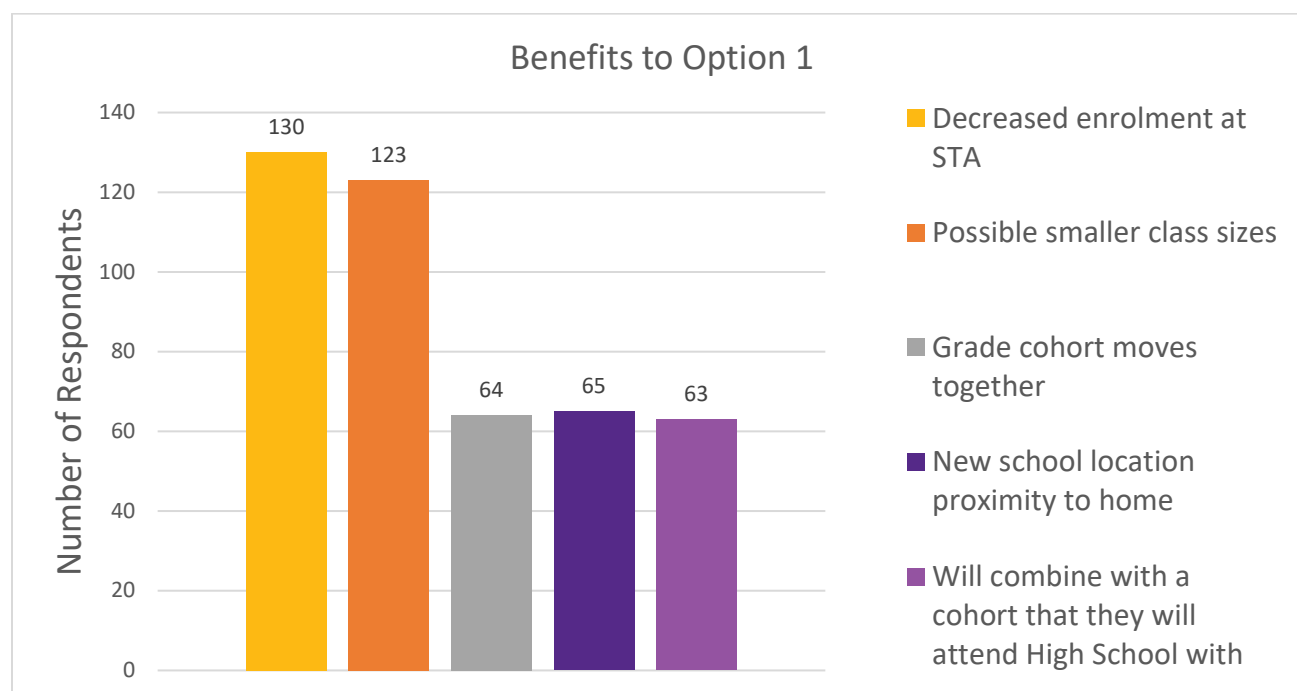
On November 6, 2023, ECSD launched an online survey for the purpose of collecting feedback on three options presented to address the space constraints at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Elementary/Junior High School. The survey was hosted on Survey Monkey and was open to families to respond until the end of day November 21, 2023.

**In total, there were 259 surveys completed.**

In the first question, survey respondents were asked to identify which grade their child(ren) was currently in, or if they were a staff member. Many respondents had children in more than one grade at STA.

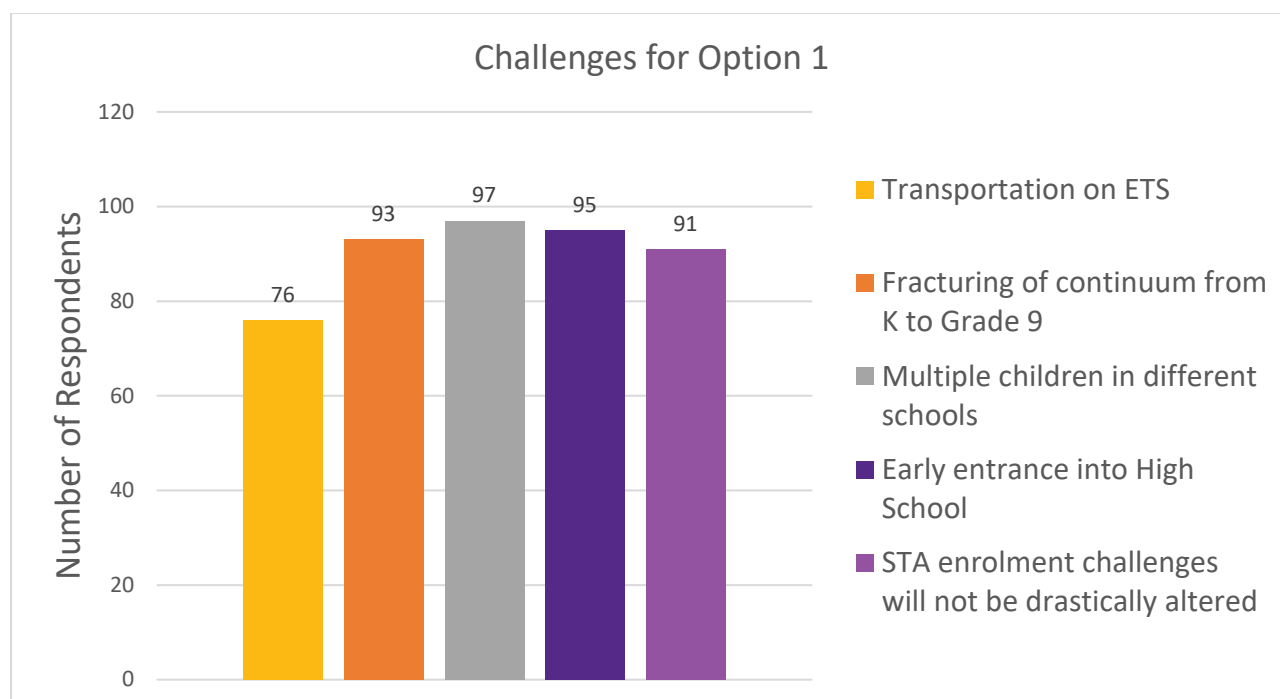


The second question asked respondents, “What are the benefits for your family with Option 1? (Please select all that apply)”. Of the 259 respondents to the survey, 214 respondents answered this question, and 45 respondents skipped it.



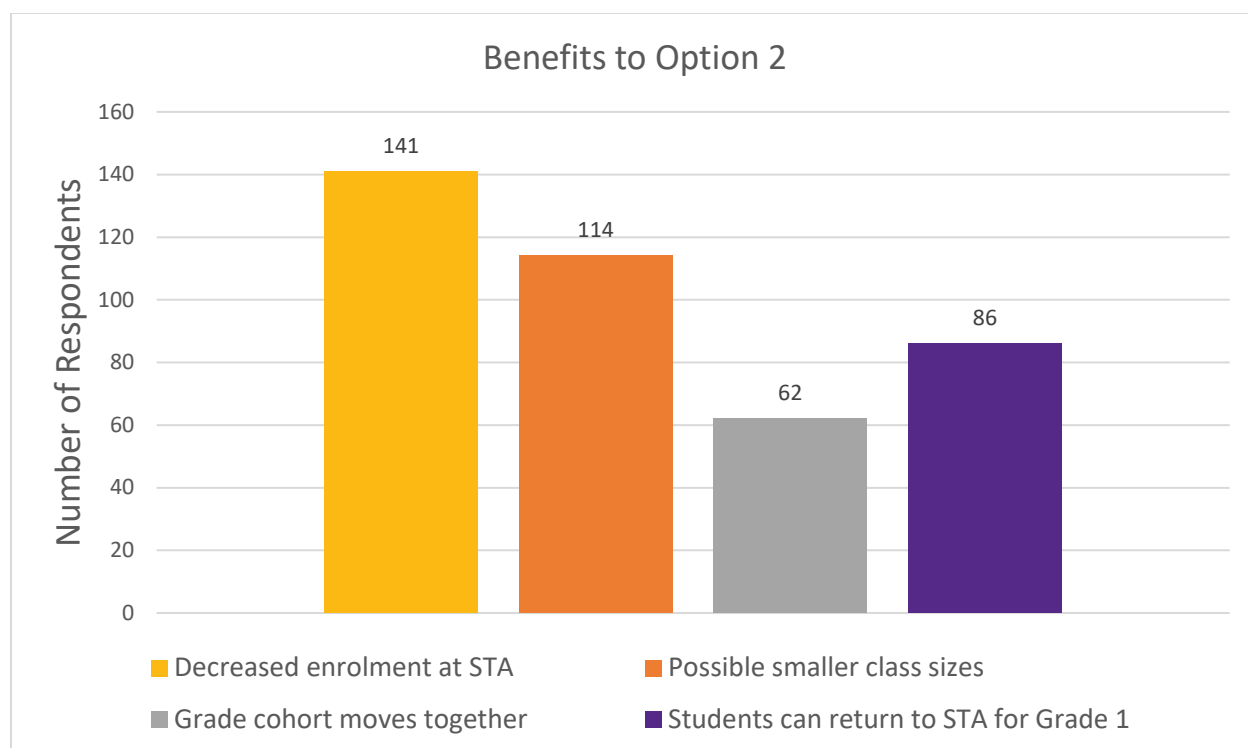
Of the 57 respondents who provided a comment for "other", 25 respondents commented that they agreed with this option. 23 respondents indicated that this option has no benefit for their family or that they did not like this option. 3 respondents indicated that this option would not affect their family, so it did not apply to them. 2 respondents said a benefit to this option would be a reduction in the traffic around STA. 2 respondents felt that the school should do more to enforce the attendance boundaries when accepting new students and one respondent commented that this option will not do enough to affect enrolment at the school.

Question three asked respondents to identify all the perceived challenges to their family for Option 1. 222 respondents answered this question, and 37 respondents skipped it.



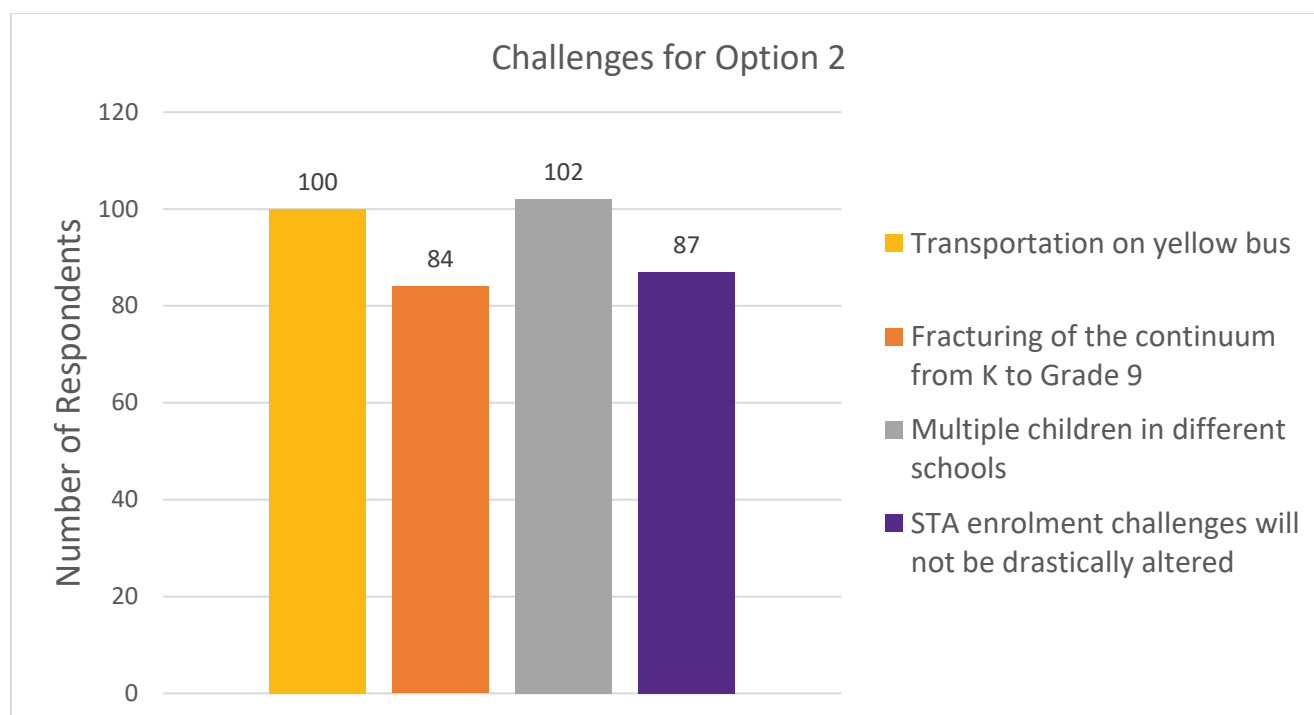
Of the 41 respondents who provided a comment for "other", 1 respondent commented that the challenge was having multiple children in different schools. 4 respondents indicated that Grade 9 was too young to be entering High School. 19 respondents indicated that this option presented no challenges for their family. 8 respondents indicated that this option would force their children to attend a school that was further from their home, increase costs in the form of bus passes and complicate transportation to and from school. One respondent felt that their student would have too many transition points with this option, one for Grade 9 and another for Grades 10-12 to attend a different High School.

The fourth question asked respondents about the benefits for their family with Option 2, and again asked them to select all that apply. 201 respondents answered this question, and 58 respondents skipped it.



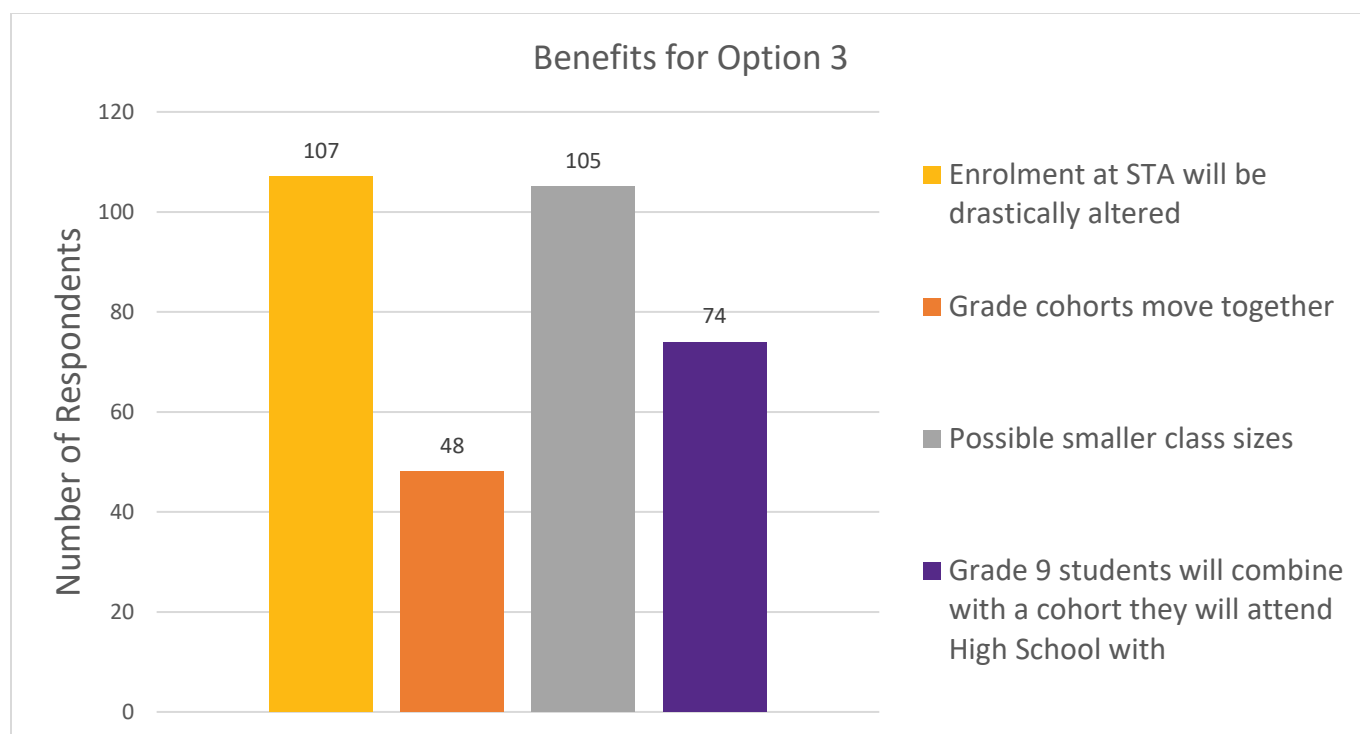
Of the 56 respondents who provided a comment for "other", 26 respondents felt that this option had no benefit for their family. 7 respondents indicated that this option was the one they liked best. 3 respondents liked that this option would allow the Grade nines to finish their schooling at STA and graduate from there. 3 respondents indicated that this option would not work for them as they would have multiple children in different schools. 5 respondents said that St. Teresa was too far from their home and would be a long bus ride.

Question five asked respondents to select all that applied for what the challenges were for their family for Option 2. 199 respondents answered the question, and 60 respondents skipped it.



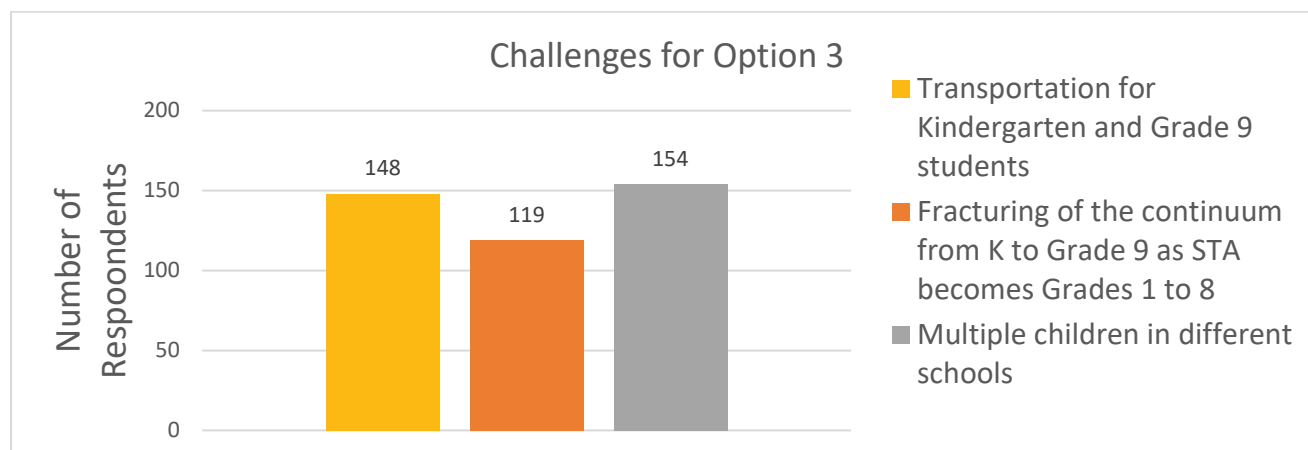
Of the 55 respondents who provided a comment for "other", 1 respondent commented that the challenge was having multiple children in different schools. 34 respondents indicated that there was no challenge for their family with this option or that this option had no impact on their family. 7 respondents indicated that this option created too hard of a transition for Kindergarten students as they must transition back to STA for Grade 1. Finally, 6 respondents said that St. Teresa was too far away resulting in too long a bus ride for students in Kindergarten.

Question six asked respondents about the benefits to their family of Option 3, and to select all that applied. 179 respondents answered the question and 80 skipped it.



Of the 65 respondents who provided a comment for "other", 56 respondents commented that there was no benefit of Option 3 to their family. 4 respondents said that they liked this option and that it would affect real change to the enrolment in the school. 1 respondent said this change would have no benefit and added the commentary that they would now have multiple children in different schools. Finally, 4 respondents said that this option was not applicable to them.

For question seven, respondents were asked, "What are the perceived challenges for your family with Option 3? (please select all that apply)". 222 respondents answered the question, and 37 respondents skipped the question.



Of the 34 respondents who provided a comment for "other", 4 respondents indicated they did not like this option at all. 2 respondents said the challenge for them was that the Grade 9 students are too young for high school and need the extra year to mature. 1 respondent said this option would mean they would have multiple children in different schools. 8 indicated that this option was not applicable to them. 2 respondents said this option still would not have a big enough impact on the enrolment at STA. 10 respondents said that this option would mean that their children wouldn't be able to walk to school anymore and the new schools are too far, especially for the kindergarten students. 2 respondents said that the transportation via ETA for the grade 9 students was a challenge.

The final question asked respondents, "Please provide any other comments you would like to share with ECSD regarding the Student Accommodations Options for St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Elementary/Junior High School?". Here is a summary of the themes of the comments received:

- Keep the Grade 9 students at STA due to mental health issues with the move, access to athletics and they should be allowed to graduate from their school.
- Move the Grade 9 students to Father Michael McCaffery.
- Keep Kindergarten students at STA, difficult for families, why should the littlest have to be made to ride the bus.
- Something has to be done.
- Look at boundaries, only families in Desrochers should be allowed to stay, check who is Catholic and in area.
- School expansion, gov't should make another school, add portables.