

DATE: March 8, 2022

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to Growth Control Model Inquiry
(Response to Request for Information #005)

ORIGINATOR: Kathy Muhlethaler, Assistant Superintendent

**RESOURCE
STAFF:** Geoff Holmes, Roland Labbe, Valerie Leclair, Christopher Wright

ISSUE

On December 14, 2021, Division staff provided Trustees an update on the Growth Control Model. This included the addition of two new lottery schools, bringing the total to five. This includes a high school for the first time.

BACKGROUND

The December 14, 2021, report to Trustees also included information on student enrolment growth, local demographic changes due to residential development, and lottery process changes for the 2022/2023 school year. The Division is seeing student enrolment growth and a current utilization rate of 80 per cent, which essentially means “full” usage of classroom spaces available.

CURRENT SITUATION

Following the information report referred to above, Trustee Kusiek submitted the following questions:

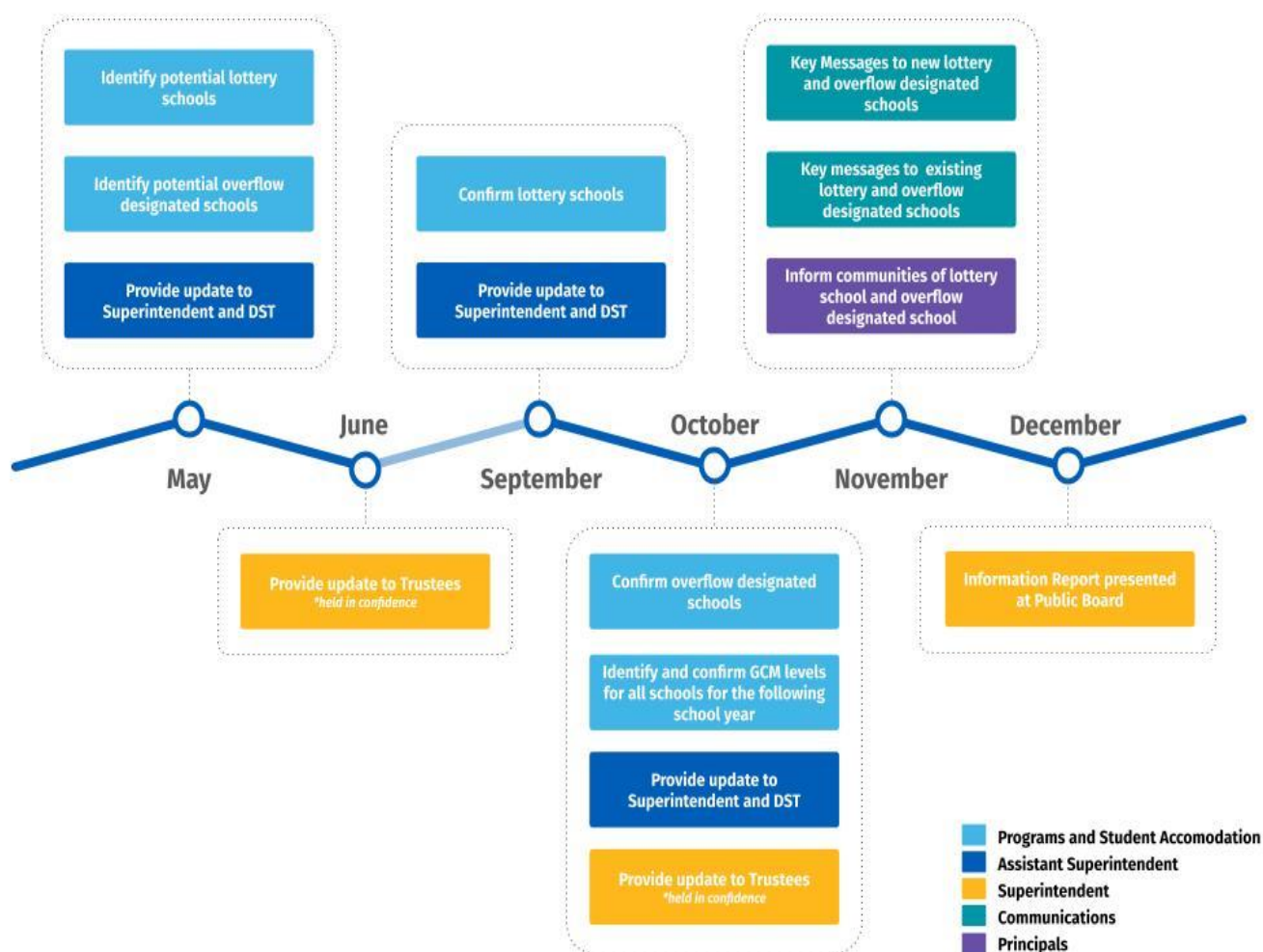
1. **Notification. Since announcing the lottery at Lillian Osborne High School, several questions have come up in regard to the notification timelines for families.**
 - a. **When planning for the upcoming school year, how early is the Division able to make a call on the need for a new or existing lottery?**
 - b. **When is the earliest possible time that families can be made aware of a new or continuing lottery at their designated school?**

Response:

Prior to informing families, administration reviews September count date enrolment data in October once it is finalized. This information is then analyzed and potential lottery schools are confirmed. This information is then shared with senior administration for confirmation, followed by a Memorandum to Trustees. During this time, central departments collaborate to work with the new lottery schools and to develop communication materials for their use. Optimally, this is shared with the community in November, three months prior to the start of pre-enrolment.

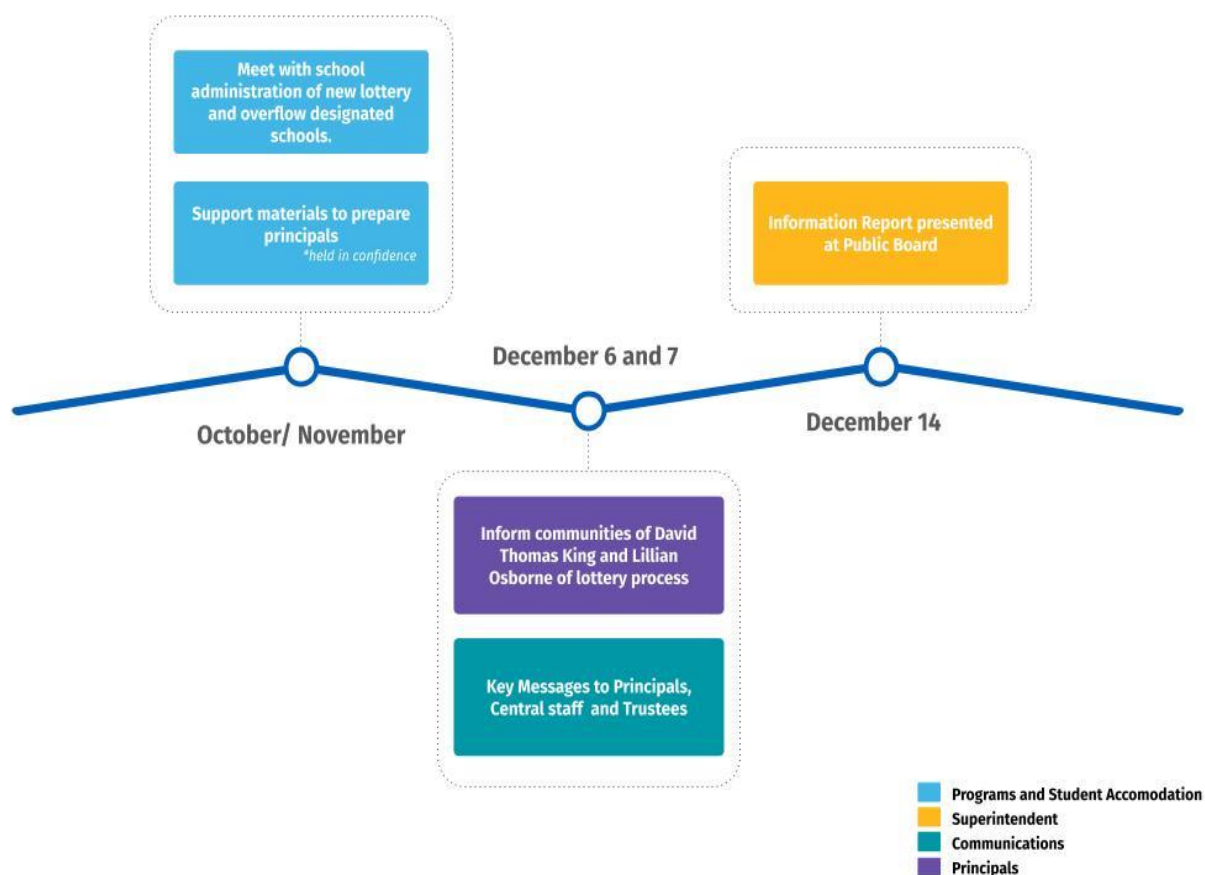
The following flowchart represents the general timeline used.

Lottery Process: Timeline



Due to the election in October 2021, timelines for the 2021-2022 school year were pushed back. The following flowchart applies to the 2021-2022 school year.

Lottery Process: Timeline for 2022



2. **Growth Enrolment Pressures.** At the heart of the issue is insufficient provincial funding for space for students. The Board of Trustees submits a Three-Year Capital Plan to the province each spring which asks for new schools and modernizations. The last modernization announced by the province for Edmonton Public Schools was in 2018. The last new school announced by the province for Edmonton Public Schools was in 2019 (opening date scheduled for Fall 2024). Optionally, please include information on this set of questions with the upcoming Capital Planning report, separate from this Request for Information.
 - a. With the current number of spaces for students and expected student growth enrolment, what is the projected increase in the number of lottery schools for Edmonton Public Schools in the next five years, up to 2027?

- b. How many spaces for students would the province need to announce towards Edmonton Public Schools maintaining up to just five lottery schools over the next five years, up to 2027?**
- c. How many school spaces (seats) for students would the province need to announce for Edmonton Public Schools to move all schools from a Growth Control Model level 3 to a level 1 or 2 and retain all existing level 1 and 2 schools at that level by 2027? (no schools at level 3).**

Response:

While the Division is able to accurately project enrolment and utilization rates over time, it is challenging to project longer-term capacity challenges at specific schools. Elements such as new school construction can be considered in Division projections, but site-specific measures such as the addition of portables, revised tenant partner space allocations, and interior retro-fit of non-teaching spaces all influence a school's ability to manage growth. Parental choice in program selection can also influence how individual school capacity progresses. As a result, the Division is keenly focused on transparency and communication regarding school-level enrolment growth through the Growth Control Model framework.

School and Central leaders collaborate to monitor enrolment for all schools throughout the school year to foresee and plan for changes in enrolment. The collective goal is to ensure high quality learning environments for all students. Over the last several years, the Division has worked with communities to improve solutions aimed at managing enrolment pressures at schools. The Growth Control Model evolved from community and Trustee feedback.

The Growth Control Model allows us to:

- clearly communicate growth and space concerns publicly
- manage enrolment growth at schools,
- minimize disruption to students and families and allow as many students as possible to attend a school close to home, and
- ensure we're addressing enrolment growth consistently at all schools across the city.

The Growth Control Model has three levels. Generally, when a school opens its doors, they begin at a Level 1 on the Growth Control Model. A Level 1 school has open boundaries and an enrolment limit on the number of students it may accept. A school will accept all students from the attendance area before accepting students from outside of the attendance area, if there is space. When a school begins to reach its capacity, the school may move to Level 2. At this level, measures to manage growth may include:

- closing the attendance area boundary,
- reclaiming space from tenants,
- adding portables, and
- making changes within the building to create spaces for classrooms.

A school at Level 2 will only accept resident students from their attendance area and siblings of current students returning the following school year. When all of those measures have been applied and a school still exceeds their capacity with resident students from their attendance area, the school will move to Level 3 on the model, which means a lottery process is applied.

When a school moves to a Level 2 on the Growth Control Model, although we are able to see they are closer to a Level 3, there are too many variables to provide an exact date. We are able to get an idea as to when they may reach a Level 3; however, between the creation of space through the applied

measures, estimated projections, and growth of an area (as these are all moving targets) it is unlikely a list can be developed for the next five years.

Specific to overall Division capacity, information provided in the upcoming Ten-Year Facilities Plan will address questions about a projected shortfall of student learning spaces should no new school funding be announced in the near future. Since 2010, the Division's school utilization rate has increased from 64 per cent to 80 per cent. Over the next ten years, enrolment is projected to increase by 21,603 resident students. Without assurance as to how much new capacity can be provided through new school, expansion and modular classroom delivery, or when this space might be provided, it is difficult to quantify the number of scenarios where schools may need to implement the lottery process to address demands for access which exceeds capacity.

d. What impact does the rate of growth in a neighbourhood have in the ongoing ability of a school to accommodate all students within a designated attendance area?

Response:

The rate of growth can have a significant impact on student generation. A slower growth or development rate will typically result in lower student generation, while faster growth can result in greater student generation peaks. Peak student generation associated with a fast growth rate is the scenario which generates the greatest accommodation pressure. Economic and market impacts on the growth rate are difficult to project. However, the local land development and building industry will respond when demand is high.

Further, the approval process and timelines for additional capacity through Provincial modular units can also influence the Division's ability to be proactive with growth accommodation. Community growth can mean schools with high utilization rates may exceed school capacity before funding approval, delivery, and installation of modular units.

e. When thinking about opportunities to collaborate with city planning, what growth rate for school age children in new/developing neighbourhoods is sustainable from an enrolment accommodation perspective?

Response:

Many factors impact student generation, including the type and cost of housing available, as well as economy and pace of development. These are not in the control of City planners. Given that student generation is never static and does have a peak that is not permanent, it is difficult to define a sustainable growth rate for student accommodation planning. The inability to control delivery of student spaces exacerbates challenges to planning school capacities and establishing attendance areas. Simply stated, the Division has historically advocated for sustainable, predictable capital funding. Proactive accommodation of enrolment growth would be more feasible if capital funding for new school construction was scheduled or linked to consistent metrics.

Historically, funding appears to have been informed by fluctuating provincial revenues and, subsequently, the allocation of capital funds. Ongoing and predictable funding of modernizations and replacement projects would align with comments in the McKinnon Report which 'strongly encourage the Government of Alberta to establish a stable and sustainable level of annual capital spending and put an

end to the “boom and bust” cycles.’ In the absence of adequate funding from the province, Administration and Trustees have supported:

- the use of capital reserves to acquire modular classrooms or to fit-up space in schools as classrooms in non-traditional space
- explored alternative delivery models involving land and property developers
- developed strategies such as the Growth Control Model and the High School Accommodation Plan
- explored concepts such as temporary starter schools
- proposed a Block Funding Model for jurisdictions to address capital requirements

f. How does the Division plan for future stabilized school enrolment when planning attendance area boundaries for a school?

Response:

Establishing attendance areas for new schools involves a delicate balance. Regulating current and future enrolment, while projecting future capacity both within the new school and the broader sector, requires detailed data, understanding of trends, and community engagement.

When the Division creates an attendance area for a school, there are many factors that inform enrolment projections, such as area plans, existing development, and proposed development within the attendance area. An overarching mandate for the Division is to ensure as many students as possible are accommodated at a school close to home. With this in mind, all Division attendance area schools serve a number of communities. All attendance areas are planned in consideration of longer-term, settled student residency, after student generation from new areas has peaked. Given the dynamic nature of community and student growth, challenges with student accommodation can be addressed through actions within the Growth Control Model continuum.

Initial attendance areas for new schools balance longer-term residency with the need to accommodate current community development to maximize Provincial new school funding. By prioritizing Provincial funding for capital priorities advanced by a school division, the Province expects new schools to be utilized to the greatest extent possible. The Division is careful to establish attendance areas that are sustainable for the foreseeable future—usually three to five years. Existing students from new and developing communities not able to access a new school will continue to travel longer distances to other Division schools. Without knowing when the next new school will receive Provincial funding, the balance becomes more challenging to maintain over time. Clear, transparent communication with community is critical.

3. Community. One important aspect of the Growth Control Model is reducing division and keeping communities together. Some feedback from families impacted by the Lillian Osborne lottery includes a variety of perspectives on community. Can you please comment on what you heard in past engagement on the Growth Control Model regarding different perspectives on community and how that informed the current lottery process?

- a. Community of peers. What did feedback say about the community of peers, say by keeping a cohort of students from one school together at the next (the idea that as children grow up their peers become increasingly important).**

- b. Community of familial connections. The Division already prioritizes students in a lottery who have a sibling attending the lottery school in the following school year. What feedback was provided about the impact of including families who have an older sibling who recently graduated (say, in the past 1-2 years) from the high school to also give preference to younger siblings? The idea behind this community is that the family already has connections and relationships to the school, sometimes having been avid volunteers and community builders within that school for many years prior.**

Response:

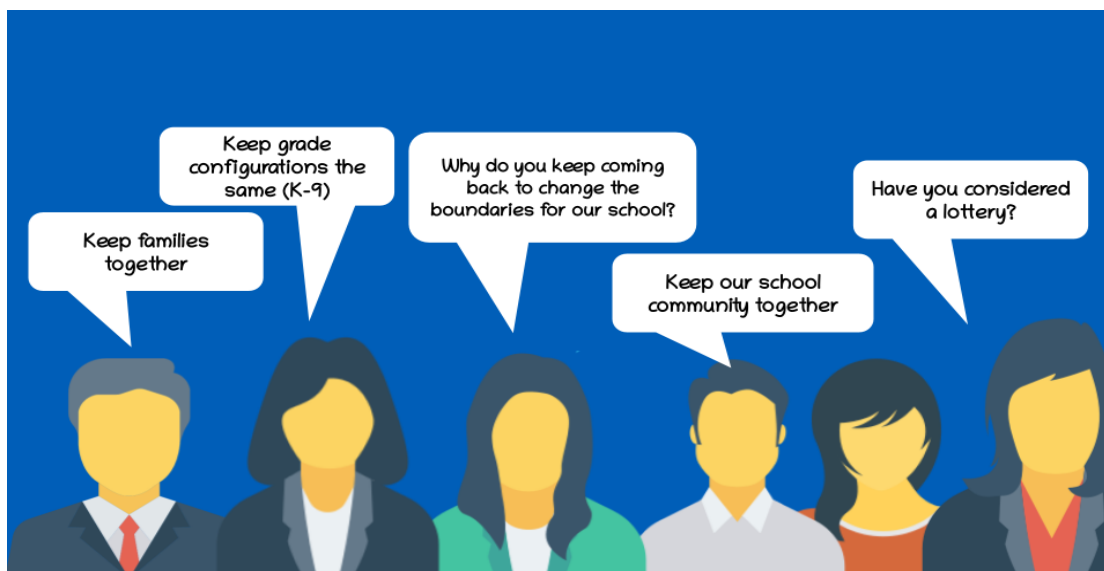
While we certainly value and take pride in the strong relationships our families develop with Division schools, the purpose of any enrolment priority given to siblings is to allow a family with multiple children to be connected to the same school in the same school year, when possible. Connections between the school community and family units, continuity of instruction, communication, important events, family support and involvement, and transportation are some of the many elements of school life that benefit from connections made as concurrent siblings move through a school. However, in order to build on those important connections, our enrolment priorities must also align with our responsibility under the *Education Act* to give priority access to resident students who live within a school's attendance area. Over time, schools may need to close attendance area boundaries to ensure a more sustainable enrolment growth. With an indefinite prioritization of siblings associated with 'past attendees' or students living outside an attendance area, the Division's requirement to accommodate resident students from within the attendance area would be compromised. Concerns related to 'proximity' (see response to 3.c below) have been noted by community throughout our engagement efforts.

The Division endeavours to offer all families a range of choices related to schools and programs. Sustainable family choice requires an element of clarity, meaning perceived peer connections or historical sibling attendance could compromise the Division's efforts to be equitable and transparent.

- c. Community of location. What did past engagement say in regards to families who live near the school being additionally prioritized within an attendance area? For example, the Calgary Board of Education employs a "walk zone" to further prioritize enrolment in an attendance area.**

Response:

The Division started engaging with hundreds of families around measures to control growth at schools in 2013. At that time, we engaged families from 11 school communities experiencing enrolment growth. Since then, the Division has gathered feedback from many more school communities experiencing growth and implemented various measures to support this growth. These have included changing attendance areas to make them smaller, redirecting students, and/or removing grades. These measures impact large numbers of students, and stakeholders have found them to be very disruptive, especially when the attendance area changes more than once.



Conversations related to such efforts also become divisive within communities with stakeholders often proposing alternate approaches that benefit one group at the expense of another.

Removing portions of an attendance area or specific grades takes many years to reverse as the school's ability to accommodate all students within the attendance area must be guaranteed. Without the ability to limit potential overcrowding, longer term growth patterns must settle over time. Since 2013, calls for a less disruptive, less divisive, more equitable model have been made by the school community. In 2019, a lottery process was developed as part of the Growth Control Model and became the preferred measure for managing growth by the Division and community stakeholders, given that it:

- impacts the fewest numbers of students possible
- can be applied to specific grades only, and
- can be removed easily when no longer needed, again on a grade by grade basis.

When researching the lottery process, one of our points of reference was Calgary Board of Education (CBE). Walk zones at all CBE schools determine eligibility for transportation service within a given attendance area. These walk zones are also included in the priority sequence for their lottery process—students residing in a walk zone are prioritized ahead of all other students residing in the attendance area. Edmonton Public Schools determines walk zones differently. For our Division, walk zones are considered to be the boundary of the neighbourhood in which the K–6 school is located. The concept of proximity, however, is considered by both jurisdictions. Creating smaller walk zones than the walk zones the Division currently uses would create a division within communities in an attendance area.

Growth control measures are difficult for stakeholders no matter how community is defined and reflected in the Division's response. Division staff respond to all stakeholder concerns and discussions with empathy and understanding.

4. Transportation. Families are concerned about the cost of transportation through yellow bus service or ETS passes should they need to go to the overflow designated school.

Context:

Student Transportation is funded from two sources: provincial transportation grants and student transportation fees. In recent years, a number of changes have been made to Student Transportation fees as a result of adjustments to Provincial funding, updated regulations regarding fees, and engagement with stakeholders. The current transportation fee structure was developed following comprehensive consultation with Trustees and stakeholders. The current structure aims to minimize fees for all riders and provide flexibility for families to choose programming that best meets their needs.

a. What is the current ETS bus subsidization rate? How does this compare with subsidization rates for the previous three years?

Response:

Between 2016 and 2022, the cost for the Division to purchase monthly ETS passes from the City of Edmonton has increased from \$69 to \$73. The cost for the Division to purchase passes effective September 2022 has not yet been confirmed.

In 2016, the transportation fee for monthly ETS passes purchased by students in Grades 7-12 was \$55. As a result of changes to fee regulations and additional funding introduced in 2017 by *Bill 1: An Act to Reduce School Fees*, monthly transportation fees for this group of students varied between \$18 and \$55 depending on distance and school choice. These fees increased to between \$19 and \$60 by September 2019. When provincial funding and regulatory limits connected to *Bill 1: An Act to Reduce School Fees* were removed during the 2019-2020 school year, monthly ETS fees were restored to a common fee of \$60. Following consultation with families in 2020 regarding the future direction of transportation fees and service levels, ETS monthly fees were maintained at the current \$60 for September 2020 and September 2021.

b. What factors impact the level of subsidy the Division is able to offer for ETS passes for students? For example, the levels of provincial funding or ETS fees set by the City of Edmonton?

Response:

Transportation fees represent the difference between provincial Student Transportation funding and the total cost to operate the student transportation system. As a result, there are a variety of factors that influence the fees parents are required to pay. Some of these include the level of provincial funding received, demand for transportation resources, the overall service levels delivered across the Division and changes to operational costs.

c. When is the timeline for ETS bus subsidization rates set? How can the Division and Trustees work to reduce these costs for all families, and in particular families impacted by the lottery and further travel to a designated overflow school?

Response:

Annually, following the announcement of the Provincial budget and confirmation of anticipated Student Transportation funding, administration presents a recommendation to Trustees regarding transportation fees for the upcoming year. In recent years, Student Transportation's provincial funding has been held at 2019/2020 levels pending the development of a new funding model. As carriers and transportation partners, including Edmonton Transit, have indicated they are being impacted by broader economic pressures, the Division will need to consider how increasing costs may impact service levels and parent fees. Currently, a recommendation to the Board of Trustees regarding transportation fees for the 2022-2023 school year is anticipated before the end of May 2022.

d. In what ways does or could the Division work to inform families in advance that by choosing a home in a high growth neighbourhood, they may need to travel further to school?**Response:**

The Division works with developers to communicate school designations to their lot purchasers and home builders. Periodically, the Division will contact realtors and home builders about new school attendance areas when they are established to try and reduce misinformation to prospective buyers. Efforts are made to ensure clear, consistent information is provided by schools to support clarity of accommodation plans for new areas. The Division communicates any changes being contemplated when new schools open or when Growth Control Measures are impacting access to schools. Ultimately, using Division on line tools or contacting the Division directly provides residents and home purchasers with definitive information about school and program access.

e. How does the availability of current ETS routes factor into decisions around choice of designated overflow school for junior high and high school students?**Response:**

Transportation is one of many interrelated factors that is considered in school designation. Student Transportation staff regularly review the availability of transit service across the City of Edmonton and consider ways the Division and ETS can collaborate to provide service to students. In some cases, existing routes and transportation patterns provide insight into what future transit service may look like when school designations change. In other cases, current routes may be adjusted to serve anticipated travel patterns. Annually, the Division provides ETS with accommodation data and school start times so they can be considered in the planning of transit service. Typically, bus routes and schedules are planned during the spring and summer to be ready for the September start of school. In this regard, the Division is able to be responsive to choices made by families during pre-enrolment and to facilitate a supportive service model across the Division.

KEY POINTS

- The Growth Control Model has allowed administration to manage enrolment growth and meet demands for space in Division schools with the least disruption to families as possible. The goal of the model is to ensure schools do not get too full while also allowing as many resident students as possible to attend a school close to home. The model is transparent and proactive with families about space challenges that may be approaching in some schools.
- The purpose of any enrolment priority given to siblings is to allow a family with multiple children to be connected to the same school in the same school year, when possible. The Division's enrolment

priorities must also align with our responsibility under the *Education Act* to give priority access to resident students who live within a school's attendance area.

- For our Division, walk zones are considered to be the boundary of the community in which the K–6 school is located. As such, the concept of proximity is considered by the Division.
- Transportation fees represent the difference between provincial Student Transportation funding and the total cost to operate the student transportation system. Transportation fees have undergone a number of changes in recent years due to changes in government funding and regulation. The current transportation fee structure was developed following comprehensive consultation with stakeholders and aims to minimize fees for all riders and provide flexibility for families to choose programming that best meets their needs.

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