

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STRATFORD SCHOOLS PROPOSED RESTRUCTURING THOUGHTEXCHANGE PROCESS

The *thoughtexchange* online engagement process for the Avon Maitland District School Board Stratford Renovation Project took place from October 22 through to November 5th, 2018.

During this time AMDSB invited staff, students, parents and community members to share their thoughts regarding the proposed restructuring of Stratford Central and Stratford Northwestern secondary schools.

The *thoughtexchange* process allowed participants to share their thoughts and prioritize the thoughts of others. Our goal was to get a sense of shared values and priorities from our community.

There were 1,381 participants in the *thoughtexchange* process, who shared 1,195 thoughts, and assigned an astounding 74,479 stars to their top priorities from across the Stratford and area community. 48% of respondents were students, 36% parents / guardians, 11% staff, and the remaining were other / community members.

Please see the link to the *thoughtexchange* summary provided on the AMDSB Stratford webpage for further information on the results.

The *thoughtexchange* process solicited community input on the following:

What are the most important things we should consider when making decisions about restructuring Stratford Central and Stratford Northwestern.

The AMDSB Stratford Renovation Project *Thoughtexchange* went out to all students and parents at both the Stratford Central and Stratford Northwestern Secondary Schools, and to grade six parents at the feeder elementary schools. In addition, the information was shared online, and via press coverage to all community members.

Due to the overwhelming response and input, a number of themes emerged from the *thoughtexchange* analysis. First, it is clear that good school programming and maintaining high quality of education are top priorities. There is a strong sense that both schools provide

excellent programs with high levels of student achievement and stakeholders want that to continue. Maintaining extracurricular programs also emerged as a top priority.

In terms of changes to the school structures, there was a mixed response. It is evident from the shared comments that the well-being of students should be the top consideration as we work through the restructuring process and that we should strive for the least amount of disruption and smoothest transition possible. Many respondents expressed concern about the impact that a split day schedule and lengthened school day would have on after-school jobs, activities outside of school and the overall well-being of students.

Concern was also expressed about the potential in some of the six proposed options for students to be travelling back and forth regularly between the two school sites. There was considerable opposition expressed of the potential costs of busing and the amount of time students would spend on a bus. There was divided opinion on the “one school, two campus options,” with more comments against the concept than in favour. Those who opposed the idea felt it would involve too much busing, interfere with extracurricular activities and social time for students, and students would not develop a sense of belonging. Those who favoured the one school, two campus options cited the increased breadth of program that could be offered and the equity of access for students to all available programs.

There were several comments suggesting that both schools should remain separate, many hoping that both schools could return to what they are now but there were also comments suggesting that one big school is the best option.

The option that received the most direct comment was Option Four (SCSS as a 9-12 school, SNWSS as a 7-12.) Again there was divided opinion on this option: those who favoured it felt that it was the best option for ensuring that SCSS had enough student capacity to maintain its current programming. Those who opposed Option Four were mostly concerned about the impact on SNWSS of adding close to 300 more Grade 7 and 8 students.

In addition to the thoughts expressed on Option Four, there were numerous other comments on where the Grade 7 and 8 students would best be placed: in a 7-12 school, K-8, or on their own in a middle school.

Conclusion

With almost 1,200 thoughts being expressed, *thoughtexchange* has provided a great deal of information and the above is a summary of prominent themes that emerged. AMDSB will continue to analyze the responses and ratings to assist with informing in the decision-making process over the next year and a half. The tremendous response from all stakeholders involved in the *thoughtexchange* process has provided a great deal of information for consideration. This information will provide an additional layer of context to help arrive at the best decision possible, while keeping our students at the heart of this process.