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Background

As part of their annual evaluation, the Pembina Hills School Division Board of Trustees committed to a review of the number of trustees representing the division. Two board planning meetings were held in which the board spent time discussing the goals, guiding principles, timelines, and options to be presented for feedback.

The ward review presentation and survey questions were approved at the January 15, 2020 board meeting. Trustees then attended each school council meeting in January and February to present information about the ward review. Parents, guardians and community members were invited to attend the school council meetings, and complete an online survey between January 15th and February 10th.

- Barrhead Composite High School – February 3rd at 7:45 pm at BES (joint presentation with BES parents)
- École Barrhead Elementary School – February 3rd at 7:45 pm at BES
- Busby School – January 20th at 4:00 pm
- Dunstable School – January 16th at 6:30 pm
- Eleanor Hall School – January 22nd at 7:00 pm
- Fort Assiniboine School – January 22nd at 7:00 pm
- Neerlandia Public Christian School – January 20th at 7:30 pm
- Pembina North Community School – February 3rd at 6:30 pm
- R. F. Staples Secondary School – January 28th at 7:00 pm
- Swan Hills School – January 15th at 7:00 pm
- École Westlock Elementary School – January 23rd at 6:30 pm

Details of the review, including a copy of the presentation, were shared on the [division website](#) for those who were not able to attend a meeting. The survey and school council meeting presentations were promoted on the division website, as well as school websites, social media pages, and local newspapers.

History of electoral wards

At the time of regionalization in 1995, three school divisions voluntarily came together – Barrhead, Westlock and Swan Hills – to form Pembina Hills Regional Division No. 7. The new Education Act, which was legislated by the province in September 2019, mandates that all boards across the province are now named ‘school divisions’ instead of identified as regional authorities or districts. This means the school board is locally elected to represent the Pembina Hills School Division.

The current electoral wards and sub-divisions were established in 1994. Since then, enrolment has dropped 1,578 students and there are four less schools.

Goal

The goal of this electoral ward review is to analyze the current ward structure to ensure that it effectively represents both the general and school populations and communities in alignment with Policy 7-0 Board Operations: Wards.

Guiding Principles

1. Trustees represent the division's interest in public education. Trustees bring their knowledge of the communities and schools they represent to the board table in order to make decisions in the best interest of all students. The board must continue to balance the needs of all schools versus individual schools.
2. As locally elected officials, trustees are accountable to their communities and public. School board and municipal elections are held every four years. The next election will occur on October 18, 2021.
3. The *Education Act*, section 76 allows school divisions to elect trustees at large or by wards. When elections are at large, all persons residing in the school authority's geographical area vote for all candidates.

Decision Making

The final decision regarding the ward review rests with the board. The board will consider the following factors:

- Representation by population: +/-25% of the average ward population
- Sparsity of population
- Community input
- Potential cost savings
- Increased responsibilities of trustees - if reducing the number of trustees to 6

If bylaw changes are necessary they must be passed by December 31, 2020, and would take effect for the October 2021 general election.

Role of the Trustee

An individual trustee has no authority to make decisions—each trustee contributes to the collective work of the board. A trustee can bring forward local issues and concerns for discussion by the board. It is also important to note that trustees do not represent any one school or community. Rather, they make decisions based on the needs of the entire division.

Trustees also make presentations at local schools or to division departments, such as citizenship wards, long service recognition to staff, and exemplary achievement awards. They also attend

important school events like school council meetings, concerts, assemblies, graduation and Remembrance Day ceremonies.

Although Vista Virtual School (VVS) and the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC) are not directly impacted by this ward review, it is important to note that the Pembina Hills School Division Board of Trustees represent both entities. Trustee representatives are assigned to attend events and presentations, the same as community schools.

Currently, trustee Kerry McElroy is the board representative for Vista Virtual School (VVS), which is the largest online school in the province. Vista Virtual School serves Alberta students located across the province from two campuses located in Edmonton and Calgary.

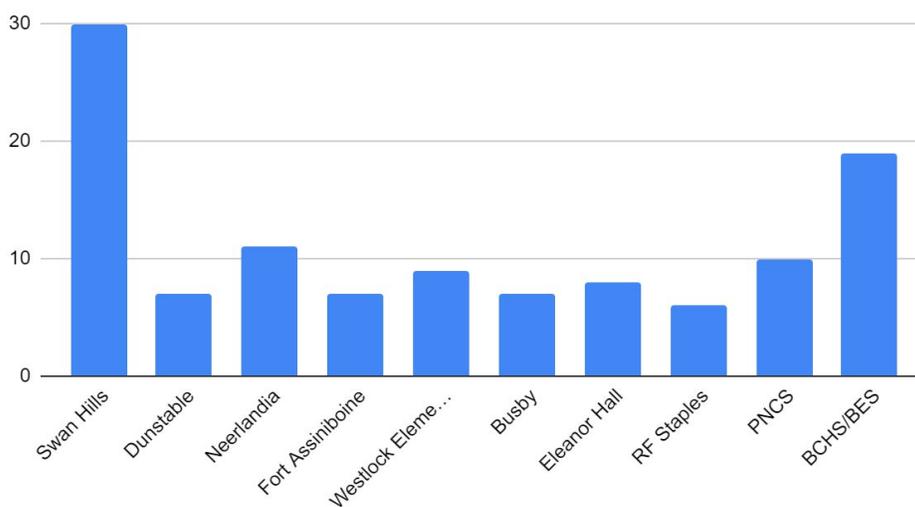
Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC) provides services to Alberta School Divisions and their students through a Service Agreement between Alberta Education and Pembina Hills School Division. On behalf of the provincial government, ADLC supports Alberta schools and their students by providing Grade 1-12 course instruction and teaching resources. Trustee Wendy Scinski is the board representative for ADLC.

Summary of Meeting Attendance

A total of 114 people attended school council meeting presentations. The survey received 160 anonymous responses, however 12 were identified as duplicates, so a total of 148 responses is included in this data.

- 64 people said they attended a meeting (43%)
- 84 people said they did not attend a meeting (57%)

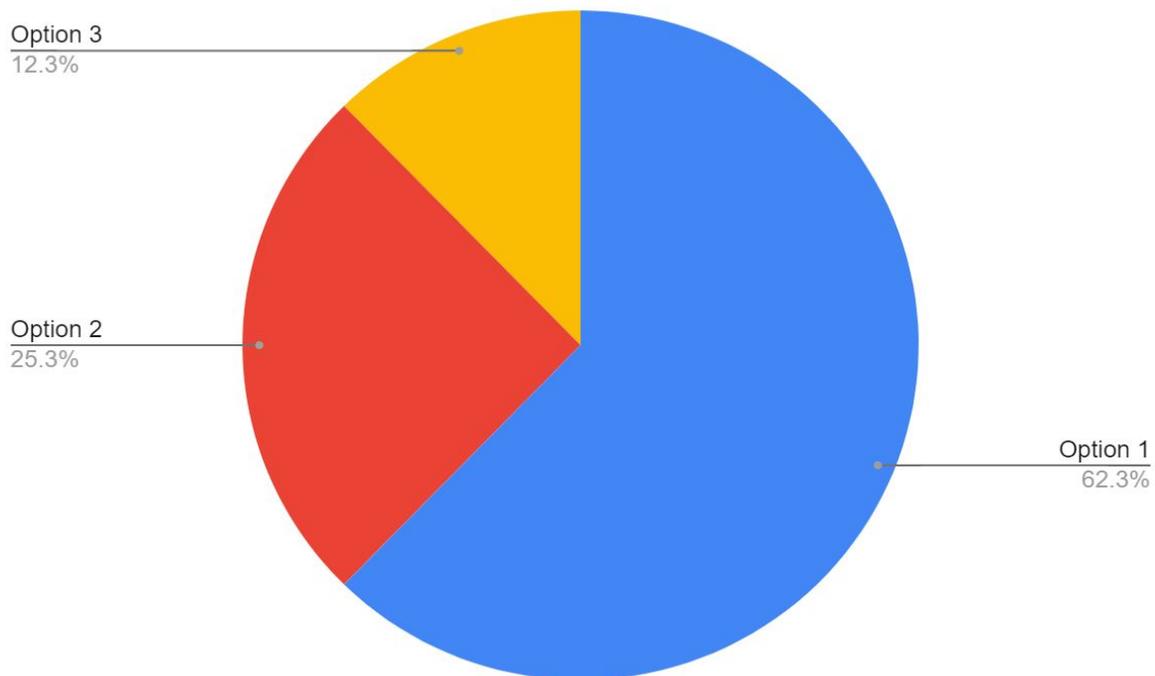
The chart below shows the meeting attendance by location.



Summary of Survey Responses

Survey respondents were asked to choose the option they support. A total of 146 responses are included in this data set as 2 responses were omitted due to two options being selected.

- 91 people (62.3%) selected [option 1](#)
 - Three (3) wards: Barrhead, Swan Hills, and Westlock
 - Seven (7) electoral subdivisions; total of seven (7) trustees
- 37 people (25.3%) selected [option 2](#)
 - One (1) ward: Pembina Hills School Division
 - Four (4) electoral subdivisions; total of six (6) trustees
- 18 people (12.3%) selected [option 3](#)
 - One (1) ward: Pembina Hills School Division
 - Two (2) electoral subdivisions; total of six (6) trustees



Full details of the ward review and options presented are available on the division website at <https://www.phpschools.ca/school-board/electoral-ward-review/>.

Themed Survey Comments

Respondents were also asked for input on the following question:

What should the school board keep in mind as it makes its decision about the ward review?

Please note - duplicate responses are only entered once in this summary report.

Swan Hills Trustee

The board of trustees received a resignation letter, effective September 30, 2019, from trustee Nancy Keough who represented the Swan Hills ward, as she was relocating out of the country. Trustee Kerry McElroy was appointed to serve as the board representative for the ward of Swan Hills and attend school council meetings and events associated with the school.

Following are the verbatim comments from the surveys:

1. we need a trustee in our school to represent us
2. Swan hills School needs trustee to represent us.
3. We need a voice in the school board
4. Swan Hills School needs a representative.
5. Please keep in mind the fragile state of affairs that the town of swan hills is in. We can not afford to lose any more resources from this area. If anything major ever happened to this school or the hospital, swan hills is done! Everyone who is left will leave. Please help us educate our children and lets not take anymore resources away from them. They already feel outcasted from the rest of the divisions.
6. Swan Hills School should have their own trustee for many reasons one being that SHS is an entity on its own. We are far from the other schools. We are a pre school to grade 12. School. Be that we are on an island all the more reason we need our own trustee that understands our situation. We have had to fight to make it where we are now. I feel the school building itself is in better shape than its ever been. We have an admin that is very supportive to students as well as staff. We work hard here in Swan Hills to provide the students with what ever they may need to attain the best education plan for their needs. Sometimes it's hard in a community that is isolated to make each and every student to feel like they are worth it. Sometimes we are over looked and I feel if we had a trustee to represent us they can help us with our voice.
7. Swan Hills needs it's own trustee.
8. Swan Hills is a school that is partially isolated from the rest of the division and needs proper representation due to the diverse needs of the school. (I live in Barrhead and feel Swan Hills needs to keep their trustee.)
9. The decision should be based on the greater good of swanhills school .we need a voice to determine changes and policies that affect our rural school.
10. Swan Hills wants it's own representation. I support a 4th option. Five trustees giving Swan Hills one trustee.
11. Keep in mind how many things will get lost without that tie breaker vote. Swan Hills is unique because it's the only k-12 school, and has unique circumstances like being

essentially a rural school in town... numbers can't account for everything, not when rural schools are involved. The chair and vice chair get extra money on a monthly basis if your looking to save...

12. Swan Hills needs to keep its OWN trustee
13. Swan Hills wants to be represented, our opinions matter
14. Keep Swan Hills
15. We need a voice here
16. Swan Hills needs a representative from Swan Hills
17. Keep swan hills trustee
18. Swan Hills deserves to have a voice. By removing their trustee position, where would that voice come from? KEEP the Swan Hills Trustee position.
19. Swan Hills needs to have a representative for the community.
20. That Swan Hills has representation from their area.
21. Swan Hills is a unique community
22. The school board needs to keep in mind that Swan Hills residents would like to continue to have a Trustee from Swan Hills. Also, an even number of trustees is not a good options ever. There should always be an odd number to avoid deadlocked votes on any board. So I would say option 1 or go down to 5 Trustees.
23. Every community needs a voice. No one else understands our community better then someone who lives here, and loves our town, who knows and cares about our children.
24. We discussed an option 4 at the meeting about going down to 5 trustees with Swan Hills still having a rep. I fully support this option as well. As a born and raised resident of Swan Hills, I truly feel as though our school don't matter much to our school division.
25. Please consider that 6 trustees does not create a fair voting environment. Due process will be interrupted. It was unfair to not allow a bi election in Swan Hills, with two years still left in the term. Go down to 5, 2 Barrhead, 2 Westlock, 1 Swan Hills. Or don't reduce at all.
26. I don't want to see swan hills school slip between the cracks we need to ensure that we have a voice in our school district
27. Does the financial gain of a smaller Board really make that much of difference? The unique needs of Swan Hills being the only K-12 school in the district, we need to have representation for our school and our community.
28. The unique needs of Swan Hills being the only K-12 school in the district, we need to have representation for our school and our community.
29. Because we are a k-12 school we need a trustee to represent everyone
30. With such a diverse environment in Swan Hills school as it being a k-12 school the school needs it representation on the trustee board
31. Swan Hills cannot be left behind, we NEED and DESERVE the same benefits as a larger school. We may be small but we're mighty! (The town and the students) Our students deserve to stay out of the 'cracks'.
32. Be mindful that Swan Hills is still heard as a community. Hopefully all areas and their uniqueness are listened to.
33. Swan Hills maybe smaller but ratio to ratio have the same amount of students
34. That Swan Hills needs representation for our specific needs
35. This ward review is going against the original spirit of the amalgamation of the three school boards, which was THREE EQUAL PARTNERS WITH EQUAL REPRESENTATION. Swan

Hills, a founding member, came is as an equal partner with the same amount of money contributed to the pot and the same amount of representation. Perhaps a fourth option should be considered, a 5 person board. Reduce the rural representation of Barrhead and Westlock to one board member each, one for the towns of Barrhead and Westlock and one for the town of Swan Hills. This restores the board to an uneven number so tie votes are less likely to happen. Rural board members of those areas would only be traveling in their areas and not up to Swan Hills and can directly represent the area they are familiar with as well as the rest of the school population. Swan Hills can continue to represent their student's view point as well as those of all students in Pembina Hills Division. Also the Swan Hills board member can continue to represent the ADLC.

In addition to the savings of reducing the board by two members as outlined above, [\$40,000.00 using your calculations of saving for deleting the Swan Hills board member] additional savings could be realized by the halting of paying the Board Chair and Vice Chair guaranteed paid days per month, 9 days in total, regardless of whether they work them or not. Currently that cost is \$1944.00 per month or \$23,328.00 a year in guaranteed wages for possible worked days. Hold one meeting a month over the internet instead of in person, reducing travel costs. Do not provide meals at meeting, the rest of the work force brings their lunch to work so should the board. Other than the provincial board association meetings curtail travel for board unless absolutely necessary, only send one representative and insist on good reporting back.

Swan Hills came into this amalgamation as an equal partner and should not be the one to lose that because of the current government policies. Find other ways to save that \$20,000.00.

36. I was unable to attend the ward review. I've read the information. This was the original agreement, to change this to six board members is irresponsible as Swan Hills needs to be fairly represented, now more than ever. Save the money elsewhere.
37. I do not really like any of the options presented, just looking at it I see Pembina Hills being very protective of Barrhead and Westlock trustee positions. Swan Hills was an equal partner when the structure was changed and you've made no mention of Swan Hills taking on more. Swan Hills is a K to 12 School and is part of a big community that needs to have its own representation. I think we need Swan Hills (town) a ward, Barrhead (town)Barrhead (north south combined) a ward, Westlock (town) Westlock (north south combined) a ward. This will give 5 elected trustees. This will give fair representation for communities and student/school needs. Add Fort Assiniboine to the Swan Hills ward and trustee.
38. First off, I don't think that the trustees should be cut back to an even number. In the event of a split vote the fact that the item at hand gets discarded seems pointless and unfair to whoever put in the time and effort to bring said items forward. In that case I think the number of trustees should either stay 7, or go to 5 to stay odd, and prevent an even split. I also would like to see Swan Hills keep their own trustee. I genuinely believe from what I have heard from meetings on this that we are entitled to our own trustee and have been told that for quite some time, and also feel that if we lose our trustee we will not have anyone actually fighting for Swan Hills anymore and we need that. My preference would be to keep it the way it is with the 7 and Swan Hills having their own.

39. Not sure what population has to do with this review. You are penalizing Swan Hills because we have no surrounding area, in town is it. What you are doing is very unconstitutional and could be challenged in court.
40. Why do you want to eliminate Swan Hills
41. I understand the need to tighten purse strings but you can not lose individual representation to achieve this. Swan Hills must have a representative. I would suggest 5 trustees, 2 from Barrhead, 2 from Westlock, and 1 from Swan Hills.

Local Representation

Trustees are elected within a geographic area, not for individual schools. Trustees usually attend events and duties at the school(s) within their area, but when needed another trustee is able to fill in. All of the schools surrounding the towns of Barrhead and Westlock feed into the town junior/senior high school, therefore student population numbers end up overlapping. Committee representation is decided on an annual basis at the board organizational meeting in August. Written reports of meetings are emailed to the whole board by the attendee so as to keep the board informed.

Following are the verbatim comments from the survey:

1. Each community needs to be fairly represented by their own elected community member
2. Every school has unique challenges and need to have a say in what affects them. I am afraid if it changes Barrhead and Westlock will make decisions for what is best for them and not the smaller schools with limited funding.
3. To have all areas equally and fairly represented
4. Each ward has something to offer
5. Fairness equal representation
6. Nit all schools are the same and need different resources to cover the needs
7. A well rounded viewpoint is required to make wise and sustainable options for the district. To reduce the voice of a piece of the district without a clear plan of how to achieve feedback from that community is not looking at the future would do a dis-service to the community and the district.
8. Keeping in mind that the larger the area and the more schools that trustees need to represent requires MORE work and knowledge and a GREATER commitment for each trustee. It is VERY important that a trustee is a TRUSTED member of our communities that also understands HISTORICAL implications. As a Christian school it is VITAL that we are valued as unique in PHRD.
9. That each community in our division has its own priorities. As a member of the Neerlandia community I feel Christian education is an important fixture of our community. Trustees at large may not understand these values and as a smaller community I fear they would be overlooked.
10. Christian education, needs to be supportive of Christian Education.
11. having one less trustee may be good for the budget now but in doing so it will take away the close relationship the school councils, parent and administrative staff have with our trustees. For which they have become such a valued resource, support and information.

Making it harder for trustees to really see the needs of our rural communities and be supportive in delivering information from Phsd. Also if and when the number of student increase it will be nice to have the trustees that are already in place. Thank you

12. Please consider that the communities all deserve representation. With these limited options. I suggest you leave the seats as they are to be fair open and transparent. Choosing any of the other options is clearing showing a decision to limit a local voice. Considering the money spent by the division the \$12,000 is worth communities having individual and equal representation.
13. It is very important that each ward have representatives for their area and not for example 3 trustees from the town or county representing the whole area.
14. representation vs cost
15. The board must fairly represent all schools both town and rural. Also, keep in mind that we need to continue to support the special programs such as French Immersion and Christian Education at Neerlandia Public Christian School.
16. That there are better ways to save money rather than removing representation from our communities.
17. Rural representation for our outlying schools is important for those communities.
18. Representation of the communities. Option 2 guarantees there will be a trustee representing the towns of Westlock and Barrhead. I then like the 4 trustees at large to cover the rest of the division.
19. The elected trustees for each electoral subdivision are going to be able to do a better job if they are not spending most of their time travelling.
20. Representation need to factor travel distance as well as population
21. Everyone still needs a representative and to be heard
22. When a trustee represents the area in which they reside they are more prone to make decisions as a shepherd and not a hired hand. While it's a tough call, I prefer Option 2 because it gives guaranteed rural representation.
23. It is very important to me that we keep the Christian Alternate Program at Neerlandia Public Christian School. My only concern with not having a trustee representing our school specifically, we could possibly lose our unique small school.

Voting with Six Trustees

With a board of six trustees, if there is a tie vote, the motion is defeated. A tie vote fails. A majority of votes cast (more than half) is required to pass a motion.

There are 20 of 61 Alberta school boards that have an even number of trustees, with 6 or 8 trustees. Decisions brought to the board table are well researched and include good discussion, as well as questions for administration. There is opportunity for trustees to voice their opinion, debate with others, but also present a new view point that makes an individual re-consider. It is important to note that a board with an odd number of trustees also requires a majority in order for a motion to be carried.

Following are the verbatim comments from the survey:

1. You should never have an even number of trustees, because when it comes to vote what will they do with a tie (3-3)
2. Tie breakers
3. Votes will be unfair with 6 trustees
4. Tie breakers with 6 trustees won't work.
5. If the financial cost savings is actually worth it in the big picture. \$80 million budget and we are trying to save \$20,000. If all areas are appropriately represented. I don't like the prospect of an even number of trustees for voting. Ties are not productive.

Other Options for Electoral Wards

Following are the verbatim comments from the survey:

1. I actually would not choose any of the above options because I feel we should go down to a 5 person council but have the trustees be members at large. You can not have a council with an even number of people because what happens if there's a split vote? Then the issue is frozen and forgotten about. That is not acceptable to me. So having said that, I think option 3 makes the most sense but go down to only 5 members instead of the 6.
2. Having an even number of trustees could result in tie votes-therefore resulting in a less efficient process. If the board is going to reduce its size-maybe going to 5 trustees would be better. 1 trustee from each town-Swan Hills, Barrhead, Westlock and then 1 each for each County- Barrhead and Westlock.
3. I think they need to cut back on the number of trustees....4 would suffice this way they can save some funds for other areas needed instead of cut backs on teaching and transportation
4. That we need 5 or 7 trustees, an odd number, 6 do not work. They need to remember if people are putting their time, energy and money into something and the vote is a split vote it should not be just thrown out. We need to be able to have a majority vote, 6 can not do that everytime. Maybe add a fourth option. Swan Hills ward, Barrhead ward and Westlock ward. Swan Hills gets a trustee, Westlock gets 2 trustees and Barrhead gets 2 trustees.
5. A fourth option would be 5 trustees, 2 each for Barrhead and Westlock, one for Swan Hills
6. I believe every school/ward should have their own voice to make sure all opinions/voices are heard. There should be an odd number of trustees. Example: Five or seven, so that there isn't a problem with tie votes, which could happen quite often with six trustees. Is it possible to cut back to 5 trustees. Two Barrhead, two Westlock, and one Swan Hills. This could be considered as a cost savings measure during the difficult economical hard times that we are/and will be facing. Just some food for thought.
7. How does an even number of trustees break a stalemate vote? Will travel time and costs outweigh the savings of making a change? Would having 1 full time position instead work? Are there other ways of making the schools opinions heard these days?
8. To be fair and open. This was a collective between 3 places and now you suggest changing that to cut one out?? That is unfair, regardless of population. If you need to reduce \$,

change the extra paid days for chair and vice chair, that is over \$28,000 a year. Also reduce to 5, 2 Barrhead, 2 Westlock , 1 Swan Hills, Fort, ADLC.

9. Remember it is "Pembina Hills" as Swan Hills was one of the 3 main schools. You tend to forget that! Option 4 - 2 Barrhead Area, 2 Westlock Area, 1 Swan Hills Area
10. Option 4 - 2 Barrhead Area, 2 Westlock Area, 1 Swan Hills. Who tries to save \$20K on an \$80M budget by sacrificing a Swan Hills Trustee position. It's Pembina Hills... Don't take the hills out of it. Please continue to lobby for one school system. Not Catholic, not Charter, not Private, not Christian - One public with Religion classes of choice for credits.
11. Choosing option 1 as Swan Hills needs a Trustee. Really feel option 4 the answer. Reduce Barrhead and Westlock by one trustee each, reducing the board to 5, will save money comparing 7 to 5 trustees.
12. Option 4 - 5 trustees - two in towns, 3 "at large" for rural areas. This way there is an odd number of trustees. This way \$40,000 saved instead of \$20,000.
13. I don't support any of the options. I would like the board to consider a fourth option. I propose leaving the Westlock side of the division as it is in option one. I also propose the Barrhead side be divided into three wards... Swan Hills/Fort Assiniboine, Neerlandia/Dunstable, and the Town of Barrhead. This provides local representation across the division for rural schools as well as similar school attendance representation.
14. Consider having the town of Barrhead, an East Barrhead (Neerlandia and Dunstable) and a West Barrhead (Swan Hills and Fort Assiniboine) - one trustee in each of these wards and leave the Westlock side the same as in Option 1. This evens out the population and provides better representation for the County of Barrhead, Fort Assiniboine and Swan Hills citizens.
15. In our presentation we had talked about making Barrhead North South to Barrhead East West. This made more sense for the amount of travel and the types of schools the Trustee would be responsible for. East would be Neerlandia and Dunstable and West would be Swan Hills and Fort Assiniboine.
16. "I had to pick an option BUT I am not totally happy with that option. Option 2 - we can not have trustees at large. What happens if they are friends and from the same area/community!????? What about the rest??? Please think about Option 4.
17. I have another option for you to consider. At the BES mtg a staff/parent came up with option 4. I strongly feel her idea gives all areas a better voice and reduces the number of trustees to 6. Wards would be:
 - a. Bhd. West- SH and FA
 - b. Bhd.East- NPCS and Dunstable
 - c. Bhd Town
 - d. Westlock West- PN and colonies
 - e. Westlock East- Busby and Clyde
 - f. Westlock Town

This works out to be more even in numbers and mileage. It gives all areas a chance to have the support the need for their area schools.

Please consider another option.

With option 2 - why does the smaller spaces/ school numbers need 2 trustees each?

With option 3 - when we listen to all the town council and county council meetings. There seems to always be something one of them doesn't want to do for the other. Why would we want to do that to our schools as well? And I think this would not be a equal represented choice.

Other Comments

Following are the verbatim comments from the survey:

1. Funding for the kids
2. Times have changed and student populations are not the same. We must evolve with our changing demographics
3. Keep up the good work, I'm praying you will make the best decision looking forward
4. The views of the disabled community and accessibility
5. What's best for kids
6. Quality of education
7. What makes PHSD think we donated a trustee, as per your website, one trustee for 50 students, ridiculous.
8. What is the plan for representing ADLC and Vista Virtual? I do not see any mention of this in any of the three options.
9. Equality and cost

Conclusion

The Pembina Hills School Division Board of Trustees would like to thank the local school councils for hosting the ward review presentations. They would also like to thank all those who took the time to attend the meetings, review the information online and complete the survey.

The school board will consider this input as they make a decision on electoral wards.