

**Mount Benson Parent Presentation to
Trustees of School District 68 :
School Utilization**

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PRESENTATION

- School District 68 is fortunate to have schools which are not crowded or over utilized.
- There are only a few schools operating over-capacity in the district. Of these schools, many of them have requested the board prioritize fixing their overcrowding or over-utilization problems.
- SD68's Facility Business Plan proposes changes which will result in crowding and over utilization at almost every North Nanaimo elementary School.
- Mount Benson Parents would like trustees to reject any proposals which intentionally create over-utilization of schools.

UTILIZATION REQUIREMENTS

- The Ministry of Education **does not** require the School District to operate at any specific utilization level. This has been confirmed several times with the Ministry of Education.
- How schools are utilized is a local decision by the board. The Ministry of Education cannot be used as a scape-goat for local decisions.

How does the Ministry affect Utilization?

- The Ministry of Education is concerned that School Districts will waste taxpayer money by building and expanding schools when extra space is not needed.
- The Ministry of Education has set Utilization ceilings, or thresholds which the Ministry expects School Districts to operate below.
- If a school district's Utilization **EXCEEDS** these Ministry thresholds for an area, the Ministry will pay to build or expand schools.

BACKGROUND

- On October 24, Mount Benson Parents asked Trustees to direct staff to keep Mount Benson's expansion funding allocated to Mount Benson as part of its facility renewal and sustainability plans.
- One of the primary reasons Mount Benson Parents made this presentation, is we believe jamming students into undersized schools has a negative impact on children's education, and is not acceptable.
- There is confusion around school utilization, and this confusion has resulted in expensive proposals which focus on creating schools which will be over-utilized.

Ministry Requirements

- The Ministry utilization guidelines are provided to ensure districts do not waste taxpayer money with unnecessary construction projects.
- Most taxpayers would agree that the ministry should not approve adding new space to a district when it isn't needed.
- Ministry Requirements are not a problem. They are flexible, and they save taxpayer money.

Beating the system

- Some districts have proposed getting new construction projects approved by closing schools to inflate utilization levels.
- BCCPAC was recently advised that, *“The Ministry does not support the concept of closing schools simply to get a new school.”*

Renovations and the Ministry

- The Ministry does not have official utilization guidelines around replacing old schools.
- Unofficially, the ministry and other school districts, use 65% as the minimum utilization level for replacing schools.
- The Ministry may require replacement schools be smaller than existing schools.
- If the Ministry does not fully support a District project, they may require the District to pay costs which are viewed as unnecessary.

What is Optimal Utilization for a School?

- The optimal utilization level depends on the size of the school, and the programs offered.
- An optimally utilized school should still have space for after school care, early childhood learning, and programs such as Music and Band.
- A large school may be able to operate at 95% utilization and provide space for extra programs.
- A smaller elementary school may have to run at 85% utilization in order to reserve space for special programs.
- If a school has a high percentage of students with IEPs, their utilization may need to be lower still so that class sizes can be reduced when needed.

What are the benefits of maintaining good utilization

- Divisions can be added and class sizes reduced.
- Space is available for early years education, and after school care.
- Special Needs students can work with EAs and teachers in proper rooms instead of in closets or hallways.
- Space is available for Book Fairs, Entrepreneur Fairs, Science Fairs and special programming.
- Resources and time are not wasted trying to juggle limited space.
- Schools can efficiently handle enrollment and class composition changes.
- Schools can provide dedicated rooms to support programs like Band and Music.

What are some Problems with Over-utilizing a school

- Multi-purpose rooms become classrooms.
- Band and Music Programs get evicted from classrooms.
- After School Care programs get evicted. This creates instability in the students life, and hardship for the families who may not be able to find an alternative.
- Higher utilization means more IEP students, but less space for staff to work with them.
- In the end, portables are brought in, forcing kids to go outside to use washrooms.

The Expense of Over-Utilization

- Over-utilizing schools increases a school district's expenses.
- Coordinating and managing limited space consumes time and energy which should be spent working with students.
- Portables are expensive to buy, expensive to install and expensive to heat and maintain.
- Portables are a constant source of health issues as small windows, limited ventilation, and improper heating frequently result in mold problems. Once moldy, portables are expensive to restore or dispose of.
- Even the Ministry of Education acknowledges that over-utilizing schools is a drain on School District Budgets.
- In extreme cases, the Ministry provides a grant to help districts cope with the crippling effects of over-utilization.

To Summarize

- The Ministry of Education does not require the District to operate at any utilization level.
- Schools do not need high utilization levels to be replaced or rejuvenated.
- Operating at high utilization levels is inefficient, hurts programming and costs money.
- Well utilized schools are not full schools.
- Well utilized schools have the flexibility to provide programs and services appropriate to the community they serve.

In Conclusion

- The current utilization rate of most Nanaimo schools allows them to function efficiently and respond to the needs of their students.
- Raising the utilization rate to 100% during the lowest period of enrollment will have immediate negative affects. When enrollment rises and the over utilization problem increases, taxpayers will be forced to pay for unnecessary expansions.
- Mount Benson Parents ask Trustees to reject plans to create over utilized schools.