

Public Meetings: Draft Accommodations Scenarios

École J.H. Sissons (ÉJHS) – Tuesday, April 23 at 7:00 p.m.



Does this plan consider everything logistically, or just moving students?

Taylor Architecture Group (TAG) has multiple tasks: Looking at capital requirements, looking at projections, determining if spaces are adequate and determining how materials are relocated.

When will this plan be done? Teachers will need time to pack up classrooms.

This is why these meeting were called now. All parties need to move quickly on this so that staff have adequate time to move out of their classrooms.

Will library resources be transported safely?

The library at École William McDonald Middle School (ÉWMMS) can accommodate some additional books from ÉJHS, but not all of them. Government warehouses could be an option. The GNWT's Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) is looking into their availability. These warehouses are designed to store paper and book products safely on a temporary basis.

Will ÉWMMS be simply a French Immersion school?

Yellowknife Education District No. 1 (YK1) would like to maintain the middle school aura which includes Grades 5,6,7 English with kindergarten (K) to 4 French Immersion being discussed. The current plan calls for the art room to be maintained but science and tech labs at the school could be converted to classrooms.

Can all the Montessori classes stay together?

That is being discussed right now. YK1 has also heard from parents that they'd like junior kindergarten (JK) to 1 French cohorts from ÉJHS kept together. This is why we ask people to attend these meetings, to share these ideas.

How much room is there at École Sir John Franklin High School (ÉSJFHS) now to accommodate more students? Could a wing for that cohort be established?

The school is actually designed to take in 700 students so it can accommodate three or four Grade 8 classes comfortably. ÉSJFHS once held over 800 students.

ÉWMMS isn't a "little kid school". Why not place portables at other schools where they have playgrounds and other materials?

There simply isn't enough playground or field space at other schools to house portables.

Comment: Parents with lots of children will have to move around kids a lot, kids won't have a sense of familiarity because they'll be moving around too much. Kids want to go where their siblings are.

How is the Grade 8 choice made between Range Lake North School (RLNS) and ÉSJFHS?

That choice will ultimately be made by parents.

How's N.J. Macpherson School (NJMS) going to accommodate so many JK students?

There's a spare classroom right now and Montessori classes would be moved to Mildred Hall School (MHS) with this current plan, thus freeing up space.

Could YK1 send models to parents once they're formed and then parents decide?

That's the plan.

Could portables go to NJMS (primary school), thus keeping younger cohorts together?

The NJMS site isn't as spacious. Most of the play space would be consumed by portables.

What about families who will now have to bus families around town?

Tram Do, director of corporate services with YK1, will meet with bussing companies to work out routes and pricing. Not a concern because of their flexibility. Accommodations can be made. ECE is currently undertaking a bussing study. JK bussing would require seat belts. Need more supervision and seat belts for JK students.

How will Grade 8s from ÉWMMS adjust to a high school setting?

The plan is to cause the least amount of disruption as possible, moving cohorts and staff together, programs and exploratories will remain intact and they'll be in their own wing at the high school.

Why isn't there a meeting scheduled for NJMS?

We're looking to schedule one for Thursday, April 25, 2019 at 5:00 p.m.

Will leadership and administration be affected?

First we need to come up with an accommodations plan, then think about moving staff and administration. Knowing that this is a short-term plan, there needs to be better connections with feeder schools and partnerships between principals.

Where's the funding coming from for the four portables?

One of several established budgets for the project. Likely from the project budget and not from the capital budget (budget for new school building).

We're not going to please everyone. Middle school, Montessori disrupted more than other programs. ÉWMMS enrolment could suffer as a result.

All parties working on this know they're not going to be able to please everyone, but we need to focus on long-term visions. We're reacting to parent feedback as best as possible, taking care of most major problems.

Comment: There is nothing in the GNWT Capital Plan for the next five years. We're dreaming if we want to start building bigger schools to accommodate future shuffles. YK1 has already successfully lobbied GNWT to increase the gym size and get four portables.

Will there be a retention plan for teachers?

We need to provide teachers with reassurance, especially French Immersion teachers. Teachers will be assisted with moving and other accommodations concerns.

Comment: These projects can also be considered "adventures" for students. YK1 has supported teachers in the past during these types of projects.

Could some of these changes be made permanent?

That's being discussed right now but further consultation is required. Even before this project began there were talks of moving the Montessori program from NJMS to MHS, something that is proposed in this accommodations plan.

Comment: By July 3, 2020 everything needs to be out of ÉJHS for abatement purposes. This will require a lot of planning on the district's part.

After-school care planning and licensing takes time. This needs to be a major consideration.

This can usually be accomplished in a few weeks or a couple months. Spaces need to be assessed ahead of time, the issue for Yellowknife YWCA is staffing.

Comment: Even in early designs, there's still room for breakout sessions in schools.



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École William McDonald Middle School – Wednesday, April 24 at 7:00 p.m.

ÉWMMS currently has 265 students but has room to accommodate roughly 470 (26 classrooms). The current ventilation system can take on those numbers with the addition of four portables. The upper library at ÉWMMS will very likely be converted back into a classroom.

Will the middle school feel remain intact? Not downgraded to an elementary school?

Grade 6 and 7 English, French Immersion and Intensive French would remain at ÉWMMS with this current plan, along with Grade 5 French Immersion. Grade 8s would either go to RLNS or ÉSJFHS along with their current teachers. Programs would not be affected.

With this proposal there would be very little gym time for students. Music could also be affected. How will ÉWMMS accommodate five additional classes? How will exploratories not be affected?

École Allain St-Cyr has a brand new gym now. They used the gym at ÉWMMS for years when they didn't have one. That's an option that could be discussed with the local French school board. The district believes the school won't lose its current middle school feel since this would only be a two-year disruption. Exploratories and academies would continue to be offered regardless of which school students are sent to. Feeder school relationships need to be fostered so these programs can continue. Even currently, MHS students go to ÉWMMS for industrial arts on Mondays and Fridays.

Comment: What if there isn't enough demand for certain programs or electives? It wouldn't be ideal having high school teachers teaching music to Grade 7s and 8s.

Will renovations for other schools happen this summer?

Most proposed renovations are minor in nature so could take place next summer. The ventilation system at ÉWMMS can handle a large influx of students up to a certain maximum per classroom and with the addition of portables. A full roof replacement is also slated for ÉWMMS this summer, but that's a separate project entirely.

Why isn't MHS considered much in this plan?

Parents wanted the least amount of students disrupted as possible.

Is there a budget for renovations? How do we know this is the most cost-effective plan?

That is being worked out now by TAG and ECE needs to be informed soon. By comparison it's not a lot. Really, ÉWMMS has the most space and partitions aren't that expensive. Parents also want larger groups of students kept together. A strong recommendation the district has heard is for JK students not to go to NJMS alone. Perhaps JK and K students could go to NJMS, with Grade 5s from NJMS going to

ÉWMMS to keep languages together (allowing for better language acquisition). This will be considered. Of course, standards of education have to be met but the government would like to spend as little as feasibly possible.

How are staff at affected schools reacting to all of this?

The district has already heard similar concerns about class space and having to move classrooms fairly quickly at the end of next year. There have also been questions about breakout spaces and programming. The reality is we have to move students for two years but we're getting something great out of this - a brand new school. There will be sacrifices regardless.

Parking and drop-off is crazy at every school right now. What about when smaller children have to be walked to and from the school?

The district doesn't have an exact solution right now, but at the very least there will have to be increased supervision during these times.

There are concerns about introducing Grade 8 students to high school a little early with this plan. This is a sensitive time for teenagers and an isolated wing might not be enough.

YK1 is investigating these models now. Many other NWT and Canadian models (including École St. Patrick High School) have Grade 8s in high school settings so the district is already weighing pros and cons. Parents would also have the choice to send their Grade 8 students to RLNS.

Comment: But then it becomes three schools in three years for students and parents which is an inconvenience. We need to share the burden of hardship to make this happen.

Comment: Parents need to own this change because children are pretty flexible. Parents can't act like the sky is falling because that will project on their kids. We can't please everyone, not everyone is going to get what they want. The middle school won't be destroyed with this current plan.

There's a sense that the burden isn't being shouldered evenly, though. We need to care for the older students as much as the younger ones.

There will be homeroom classes no matter where Grade 8 students are sent. Students will travel with all their current classmates and teachers (younger cohorts will also remain intact). This could also allow them to get acclimated to high school life easier.

Comment: Camp Akaitcho and summer camps currently offered by ÉWMMS have to continue.

YK1 is doing its best to make sure this happens. There needs to be champions for these programs though. And if exploratories are ever a concern, the high school could always offer more to Grade 8 students.

Capacity is already an issue at NJMS. How could it accommodate another three JK classrooms, especially after losing a staffroom?

That depends on enrolment. The district is currently projecting two additional JK classes and not three. The current plan also calls for CASA to be moved to MHS.

Why would CASA be moved to MHS?

YK1 was discussing this even before this renewal project. It's closer to the downtown CASA already established. The school also hosts the Birchbark Discovery Centre. CASA isn't only a feeder to Montessori and NJMS, but also French Immersion at ÉJHS.

Could JK French Immersion be moved to MHS instead? Are split classes for JK/K being considered?

It's an option but we've also heard parents don't want to see JK students move alone. This would also divide staff, who could benefit from collaboration.

Could we make counsellors available to students and parents during this transition?

This came up previously and is something YK1 is investigating. Schools could host picnics or icebreakers to make the transition to a new school easier. Grade 5s already visit the middle school early to get to know the facility better.

Could the Board change the annual calendar for ÉJHS staff so it's easier for them to move their classrooms at the end of next year?

Definitely. This is already being discussed. The school has to be empty by July 3, 2020. The government also has warehouses for the safe keeping of books and other dry storage.

Will anything change in time for the 2019-2020 school year?

No, students will remain where they're currently enrolled until the following year, when an accommodations plan will go into effect.

Will there be cool-off spaces for students who need them?

Obviously there won't be as many breakout spaces or ones that are as large, but YK1 will still have some spaces. Some current rooms at ÉWMMS are too small to handle classes anyways, so these could be used for that purpose.

Comment: This is a work in progress and we appreciate the work YK1 and TAG have put into this. Other jurisdictions don't get this much choice when it comes to education. At the end of the day, YK1 will have a brand new, state-of-the-art facility.

Comment: There was a long period in between public updates. I'd encourage all parties not to do that again so that the rumour mill doesn't go into overdrive.

Comment: YK1 is lobbying ECE hard to get portables to alleviate capacity crunches.



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N.J. Macpherson School – Thursday, April 25 at 5:00 p.m.

Comment: ECE is receptive to the approach TAG is taking at this time.

Where would CASA move to?

The plan right now is to move this program to MHS.

With 600 students at ÉSJFHS already, can the school handle an additional four classrooms of Grade 8 students? Doesn't it make more sense to move them all to RLNS instead?

Parents have the choice to send their children to either school. MHS is also an option if students are worried about being a small fish in a big pond. Students would be moved over in cohorts and remain in homerooms in a separate wing. ÉSJFHS can accommodate roughly 800 students. In other areas older students move around more, younger students remain mostly with homeroom teachers in select areas. Keeping Grade 8s and 9s in one area has been effective in the past. There will always be transition problems but they aren't as widespread as people think but it's good that parents are thinking about their children. More gym time and exploratories can be offered at the high school level too. Yellowknife Catholic Schools has made this work at their high school.

Comment: There will be a choice for parents of Grade 8 students except for French Immersion students who will have to go to the high school.

Why isn't MHS being considered much? Why is CASA going there?

This was already an idea even before this project began. Montessori seems to be a feeder program for NJMS and ÉJHS.

Is there more space at MHS?

YK1 heard loud and clear during previous meetings was that ÉJHS parents want to keep student cohorts together (maintain integrity of school - keep students and teachers together). MHS doesn't have as much room as ÉWMMS. The district and TAG looked at every space available. There isn't as much room at RLNS either.

Would CASA and Montessori both go to MHS? Kids are going to be divided based on this current plan.

No, only CASA. YK1 knows it can't be perfect, it can only satisfy a majority of families.

CASA is a user-pay program for two to four year-olds. Technically a private school in a public building.

Would after-school care be cut at NJMS?

Even now Yellowknife YWCA is struggling to get staff. YK1 needs to consult with Montessori and the YWCA to secure after-school care now. YK1 supplies space but the YWCA provides staff.

Parking and drop-off is already an issue at NJMS. This will only get worse with the inclusion of more classes. Can there be a grace period included? It will be an issue at ÉWMMS too.

Perhaps this can be included in the architectural bid.

Are staggered start times a consideration for students attending ÉWMMS during this two-year period? Could Allain St-Cyr dismiss their students at a different time?

The problem is this would result in a bussing issue because the company won't want to make additional routes. Routes and times will have to change regardless with the addition of more students at ÉWMMS.

So JK students from ÉJHS will move to NJMS for one year and then go to ÉWMMS for Grades K-7?

Yes.

There seem to be serious space issues at NJMS already. What will the school lose if it takes in more students?

YK1 is currently projecting three JK classes for ÉJHS at the start of this project, but it could actually be two. This totally depends on enrolment.

Will middle school programming continue unaffected? (Industrial arts etc...)

Like the high school, students will be separated by grade levels. Younger kids won't be participating in middle school student exploratories. In most YK1 schools, students are separated in this way. The aim is to maintain a middle school feel but newer students must also be made comfortable because they'll eventually be coming back anyways.

Where will the portables be at ÉWMMS?

Outside the gym wall, with access near the stage and also near the art room.

This is largely a good plan, but it feels like two schools are being more burdened than others in ÉWMMS and NJMS.

YK1 has been through this before with the fire at École St. Joseph School and sharing space with Allain St-Cyr. The gym at ÉWMMS could also be split in two and there's a fitness room. YK1 will ask the local French school board if they would like to share their gym to help during the rebuild. YK1 could also make use of fields in warmer months which won't be impacted by the placement of portables. There is no plan to keep Grade 8 students at ÉSJFHS beyond the two-year construction period.

Comment: Kids are resilient. It is parents that are mostly stressing about this. Extra staff will be in place to help students struggling with transitions. YK1 has a great opportunity in front of them. People will remember their teachers, not facilities. YK1 will support staff as much as possible so they can care for students during this time.

Why not move JK students to MHS or RLNS then, where there's less of a capacity crunch?

This is definitely a possibility and will be discussed and considered further.

Can portables be divided between schools, instead of placed at one school?

Ideally YK1 needs a big plot of land and ÉWMMS has the most to offer. It's not a guarantee YK1 can get the portables in the first place.

Comment: Initial concern was that ÉWMMS would lose a lot of its programming. That doesn't seem like the case anymore.

The plan is to ensure programs will not be impacted. Quite frankly, the numbers didn't add up when considering other scenarios. This is the most palatable solution before YK1 and parents right now.

Will there be any changes at NJMS?

There would be very few changes with the addition of only two classes. Smaller classes could be doubled up and there would be four staff in the rooms. Schedules wouldn't change either. Art and music classes could be mobile if the current music classroom is needed for a classroom space. YK1 will be adaptable over this two-year period. Problems won't persist for a long period of time. The hope is that student experiences won't be negatively impacted by this (students and staff will stay together to establish familiarity).



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Range Lake North School – Thursday, April 25 at 7:00 p.m.

Who came up with this draft accommodations plan?

TAG did in collaboration with YK1 and parents based on feedback from previous meetings. This will ultimately be a two-year interruption with everything returning to normal afterwards, on top of a brand new school.

How can YK1 save the middle school experience with this plan?

People were originally upset the whole experience of middle school would be lost. YK1 won't lose any programming - exploratories, academies etc... and younger kids won't be doing industrial arts or other similar programs at the middle school. Grade 8 classes will stay together regardless of where they go - RLNS or ÉSJFHS. Grade levels will be divided by floors at whatever school they're sent to.

Why are no changes proposed for RLNS even though there are currently four empty classrooms?

As much as possible YK1 wants to keep ÉJHS cohorts together. That's what the district heard from parents during previous public meetings. ÉWMMS has more space than any other school right now. If we start fracturing classes, ÉJHS will lose its identity and French programming could suffer. YK1 also has to think about teachers who lean on one another for support (they should stay together as much as possible). The district wants to disrupt the fewest number of people possible.

Comment: This will be a five-year build. We know that construction doesn't move quickly in Yellowknife.

Comment: Parking will definitely be an issue at ÉWMMS with the addition of more students.

These issues persist at every school in town. There's no such thing as a perfect school parking lot. Drop-off and pick-up times are always busy in front of schools. This needs to be a consideration moving forward, though.

Where is this money coming from? Are capital and renovation costs divided?

Any renovations to NJMS, RLNS and ÉSJFHS will be limited with major work being proposed for ÉWMMS. Even if this was a renovation versus a full rebuild, those costs would still be incurred. There's a capital budget and a project budget which encompasses renovations and other accommodations costs. Portables aren't a guarantee but the district is hoping to receive them.

What is the total project budget?

The district doesn't know that right now. TAG will provide a recommendation to ECE considering priorities. This project has been approved by the government so it's going ahead regardless.

Will CASA return to NJMS afterwards?

That is being considered right now. Like ÉJHS, NJMS is also quite full. Conversations were held before this project to move CASA to MHS anyways. CASA is also a feeder program for ÉJHS, not just NJMS.

Comment: Industrial arts room, music room, fitness room, specialty rooms at ÉWMMS will not be converted to classrooms despite some concerns.