



## **Q&A's for Parents Cowichan Secondary School Dual Campus**

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### **What exactly is the Board of Education proposing?**

On February 6, 2018, the Board of Education put the public on notice that at the March 6, 2018 public Board meeting they would be making a decision about whether to maintain the dual campus model of Cowichan Secondary, or separate the schools and make them two distinct schools. One location (Quamichan) would house Grade 8 and 9 students, and the other would house Grade 10-12 students.

### **Why is the Board considering this now?**

The Board of Education and district staff have heard loud and clear from parents in the district that they are concerned about their children traveling between campuses. This has come from existing dual campus parents, and parents of younger kids who will soon start Grade 8.

We have also heard about the operational challenges of running two campuses as one school—including the difficulties with creating synched timetables that meet the learning needs of Grades 8-12 students.

Prior to now, we did not have the option of ending the dual campus model, as we did not have the space to accommodate all students at either location. However, we are now placing three modular structures at Quamichan that will allow us to fit all Grade 8 and 9 students at that school. That would eliminate the need to have a dual campus.

Given the concerns raised from our school community, the operational benefits, and the opportunity presented to address the space challenges, we felt it would be a good time to review the dual campus model and split the schools.

### **What has the feedback been so far?**

Feedback received has been positive, with parents and staff expressing their support for separating the schools. Staff at both locations are supportive of the change and have indicated that they see the benefits to student learning. Our local unions have also expressed support for the separating of the schools.

### **Can we delay this decision?**

The Board has not yet made a decision about whether or not the dual campus model will end. We are still gathering feedback, and the Board will determine the way ahead at the March 6, 2018 Board meeting.

However, if we are ending the dual campus model and moving to two separate schools, we need to make the decision now as we are moving into the timeframe where staffing decisions are being made, and scheduling is being done.

**Are we moving to a middle school model?**

No, we are not returning to a district-wide middle school model. We are still moving ahead with our proposal to the Ministry of Education for a new Cowichan Secondary School that will house Grade 8-12 students under one roof. However, in the meantime we are trying to do what is best for student learning and safety.

Quamichan will be able to practice a teaching and learning model that best meets the needs of Grade 8 and 9 students, and Cowichan Secondary will continue with a high school model that works best for Grades 10-12 students.

**Won't students at the Cowichan Secondary school lose opportunities like fine arts, since the facilities are currently at Quamichan?**

No, while we are still working out details on what space needs at each school will be to fully accommodate student learning, we are confident that students at both locations will still have access to electives like fine arts. This may be accomplished through renovations at Cowichan Secondary (in part from cost savings from eliminating the need for a bus shuttle), or we may need to look at how to share facilities such as the drama space.

**My child at Quamichan was interested in joining the sports teams at Cowichan Secondary—will they still have that opportunity?**

Yes. We recognize the importance of young people participating in team sports, and we know that our Quamichan students play an important role on some of our junior sports teams. The schools will continue to work together to provide team sports opportunities to students at Quamichan. All schools in the district who do not have sports teams have an opportunity to play at nearby schools.

**Won't two schools make sharing of resources (i.e. staff and finances) more difficult?**

The schools already operate fairly independently from a financial perspective. This is what made sense when we began the dual campus model, so there is not much to change on that end.

There will be some implications to how staff are assigned, and we are already discussing these with the local unions and with our staff – and will continue to work with them on this. Our local unions have shared their support for splitting the two schools.

**Will this change made transitions for students more challenging?**

For some students, the dual campus model may have helped ease the transition of moving from Grade 9 to Grade 10. We have not noticed a big enough gain on student transitions to make the challenge of running two campuses worthwhile. Transitions will continue to be an area we need to focus on across the district.

Eliminating the dual campus model doesn't mean that staff at the schools cannot work collaboratively in a way that best meets the needs of learners. Staff can continue to

collaborate to provide various opportunities for Grade 9 students to help ease the transition.

### **Can't we just continue to bus students to the two campuses, instead of ending the dual campus model?**

The busing put in place last June and into this school year was a short-term solution to safety concerns from the community, it was not meant to be a permanent fix to the issue of students travelling between campuses.

Parents and the community asked the school district to look into this issue and provide a longer-term solution that eliminated the need for travel between campuses. Increasing the capacity at Quamichan and ending the dual campus model is currently the best solution.

### **What are the benefits of two separate schools, rather than just keeping the Grade 9's at Quamichan and still being "one school"?**

There are several benefits to both students and staff. Overall, splitting the schools allows each school to have greater autonomy over programming and scheduling of their students. This means they can better meet the needs of the unique learners at each school and in each grade level.

It is also an opportunity for students and staff to create better relationships, between themselves and with one another, allowing staff to really get to know the needs of each learner at their school. This also means less moving around for kids. This is particularly important for our vulnerable learners.

For learners, not only would eliminating dual campus be safer in terms of limiting movement between campuses, but it also restores up to 20 minutes of learning time. Currently, students who cross campuses are often having to leave their class early and/or arriving late.

Operationally, there are several benefits—the biggest of course being the ability to schedule independently of one another, allowing each school to do what best meets the needs of their learners. Professional learning opportunities can also be more focused for each staff audience, and staff meetings can be focused on the needs of learners in the building (i.e. Grade 10-12 teachers are very focused on graduation years programming, which is not a primary focus for Grade 8-9 teachers).

### **How will the identity of the schools be managed?**

Neither of the schools currently have a strong identity that students and staff feel connected to. There is a strong athletic identity, but the schools themselves would be able to build independent identities that speak to the cultures of their school communities.

**Will there be one Parent Advisory Council or two?**

Parent Advisory Councils are separate entities, it would be up to the parents of the schools to decide whether they want separate PAC's or if they want to continue as one.

**Will the timetables at both schools be in sync with each other?**

Timetabling is an operational process that will be worked out by the Principal and Vice-Principals of each school, and district staff. One of the key benefits of separating the schools is to provide greater autonomy over scheduling, to better meet the needs of their learners.

**Is it possible that Grades 10-12 students will still be taking classes at both campuses?**

At this time, we are trying very hard to eliminate the need for students to cross campuses, even for electives like fine arts. However, we need to do some further assessment of space needs at each location. It is possible that some senior students may have to travel to Quamichan for certain electives, but our goal is to keep students at their school.

**Will the bus still run between campuses if students need to access other facilities?**

Once we know whether any senior students will still need to travel between campuses for certain electives, we will look into the need for a shuttle.

**Will this decision impact our chances of getting a Cowichan Secondary School?**

No, we are still pushing ahead with a proposal for one new school that will house all of our Grade 8-12 students. The Ministry of Education is very clear that a new school is a priority for our school district and community. However, we do not know if or when this will happen.

Staff, parents, and students have tried really hard to make the dual campus model work. At the end of the day, the benefits of splitting the campuses outweighs the cons when it comes to student learning and staff needs.