

Report from the King George Community Association survey of the community on the issue of the school merger announcement, Spring 2020

Purpose

In late May 2020 a sub-committee of the King George Community Association put together a survey to gather community thoughts and options about the Saskatoon School Board's plans to amalgamate three community schools (King George, Pleasant Hill, and Princess Alexandra) and build a new school at the current site of the Princess Alexandra School (1.2km away from King George School).

After conducting our community survey, we heard from residents that are disappointed and angry over the lack of consultation by the School Board, Ministry of Education, and City. The top priority of this report is to highlight the ongoing need to start consultations especially addressing topics of safety, sense of community, and heritage maintenance as desired by residents

Survey

We sent out close to 800 print surveys in the neighbourhood and posted an electronic survey on our Community Association website and Facebook page. We received 61 responses.

The questions asked on the survey were:

- Do you have children attending King George School?
- Do you attend community events or classes at King George School or take advantage of the sports fields, rink, or playground?
- How will this change impact you or your family?
- Do you think your needs were taken into consideration in this decision to merge schools and to locate the new school at the present Princess Alexandra site?
- In your opinion, what will be the effect of the closure of King George School?
- If King George School closes, what are your hopes and concerns for the building & property?
- Any additional comments?

Results

40% of respondents have students currently attending King George (KG), or planned to in the future.

70% of respondents attend community events at the school.

75% of respondents feel their community needs were not taken into account. Many people expressed shock and dismay at the announcement. There is a sense that the announcement has come after important decisions have already been made. There is definite concern that meaningful community engagement is not happening.

15% of respondents voiced concerns that the factors motivating the decision to amalgamate schools and the selection of the Avenue H location are purely financial. There is a call for more transparency around these decisions.

Responses to the remaining 4 questions revealed a few common themes:

There is a focus on the importance of the community school to the KG Community. 31% of respondents talked about the sense of community that is built through attending a local community school, and the benefits it provides for the whole family. 20% of respondents the negative implications of larger class sizes and a larger amalgamated school on individual student success.

34% of respondents also discussed the importance of having a school and community space within walking distance from home. Having school and other activities a safe walkable distance for children is important for reasons of safety, health, and equity. Walking to school builds exercise into a child's day. It also means that children can get themselves to school for class and home after participating in afterschool activities. This is important in cases where a child misses the bus in the morning or their families are not able to pick them up after school.

36% of respondents mentioned that the school attracts families to the neighbourhood and that without it, fewer families will choose to live in the neighbourhood, and some may even move out due to the loss of the school.

20% of respondents talked about the school grounds as a community amenity, with the green spaces, playground, basketball courts, and rink being important features.

The KG building itself is an icon representing the neighbourhood. 39% of respondents mentioned the value of KG as a heritage building and the importance of maintaining it.

There is great concern that the Princess Alexandra site, on Avenue H between 20th and 22nd Streets, is not a suitable location for a new school facility. 15% of respondents said that KG should have been selected as the location of the new school.

Most of the concerns about the Avenue H location center on safety. Strikes against this site include its proximity to level crossing train tracks and high traffic streets. The position of the site in a largely commercial, rather than residential area, was also raised as a concern. There are also concerns about crime levels in the immediate area. 15% of respondents stated that they wouldn't send their kids to the new school.

There is also a safety concern around the void that will be left in the middle of King George if the school is no longer there. The school attracts families to the community. Without the school the community loses important amenities and a hub which creates a positive sense of community.

25% of respondents plead that KG remains as a school. However, if the KG building is no longer a school, 36% of respondents stressed the need for a community centre in the neighborhood. The KG site should continue to be a place where community

gatherings, classes, and other programming can take place. Other multi-use facility ideas were mentioned by 10% of respondents. Ideas for what could be done include spaces for artists, offices or co-working spaces, a grocery store or farmers market, and a community or CHEP garden. A further 10% of respondents mentioned the importance of maintaining the green space as a park.

Conclusion

As a community, we are disappointed by what has been many years of decreasing investment in community schools and community school programming. The School Board and the Ministry of Education is failing families in our neighbourhood with the removal of KG Community School. If the City of Saskatoon goes forward in collaborating with the School Board on the amalgamated school facility on Ave H, without first undertaking proper engagement of the community around the fate of the KG school site, it will be a great disappointment.