

**A Report to The Board of School Trustees  
School District No. 6 (Rocky Mountain)**

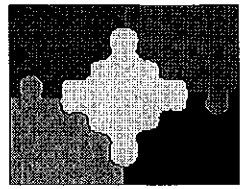
**Reconfiguration in The Golden Zone**

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Consultants – Future Focus**

*MARCH 2001*



# Future Focus



## **Preface:**

In order to make informed long term decisions about the configuration of the schools in the Golden Zone, School District No. 6 requested a study which would take into account the following factors:

1. Enrolment projections for the next 5-10 years, including information about birth rate, economic development factors, in and out-migration and a consideration of the enrolments of both French Immersion and Regular programs.
2. An assessment of the implications of these trends for schools in the zone including a consideration of the consequences for schools remaining in their existing configurations and/or a consideration of what other configurations might be feasible.
3. An examination of whether or not there should be restrictions placed on the intake for any program or school, including consideration of maintaining all programs and the implications for resources and staffing.
4. Recommendations for possible reconfiguration options.

In the course of developing this report and its subsequent recommendations, the consultants reviewed all available documentation provided by the school district and interviewees. This included a history of the district, now a zone of SD No. 6, previous commissioned reports, population projections by the zone, British Columbia Local Health Area Population Estimates, Age Specific and Total Fertility Rates by Local Health Area and Quarterly Regional Statistics for the Thompson/Okanagan Development Region. This includes Kootenay stats. for Golden.

Also considered was the BC Stats. Income Profile for Golden based on 1996 figures. The 1997 Presentation by the Director of BC Stats., Don McRae to the 27<sup>th</sup>. Outlook Conference, Association of Professional Economists, was also reviewed.

On an initial trip to Golden July 6/7, face to face interviews were conducted, singly or in groups, with the following persons:

Paul Carriere, Ian Robinson, Viccy Nelson, Shary McTighe, Dianne Wiest, Todd Wilson, Sean Madill, Dave Garbutt and Anita Ure.

A Meeting was held with the Steering Committee: Maureen Gillen, Robert Sharp, Connie Barlow, Anita Ure, Meg Langley and Claire Drysdale.

Additional meetings were held with: Meg Langley, Claire Drysdale, Linda Shusheski, Margit Bezzola, Kim Wilson, Brenda Mahon, Connie Gibbs, Mary Pecora (accompanied by Claire Drysdale), Niki Kuhle, Diane Gallacher, Dallas Matheson, Pierette Robinson, Judy Doyle, Debra Tihor, Marion Doebersap, Linda Salmon, Elliot Nueman, Barney Barderson, Ron Oszust and Anita Ure.

On a second occasion, Sept. 10/12 meetings were conducted with Superintendent Dick Chambers, Assistant Supt. Anita Ure, the Steering Committee, Golden Zone Trustees and school based personnel in the elementary and secondary schools. The Field DPAC indicated that they preferred to decline a meeting at this stage.

Information about local birthrates quoted on P5 of this report was provided by Ann Younger, Regional Health Nurse.

Both documentary and anecdotal evidence suggest that the zone faces several organizational problems:

1. The enrolment in the regular program stream is dropping, while French Immersion enrolment increases at the K level for the '99/00 school year
2. There are both short and long term enrolment concerns, complicated by the existence of two relatively small schools within the zone.
3. Within the community there is a mixture of cynicism and optimism about the future capacity of the zone's schools to continue to offer the current range of programming.
4. The immersion enrolment increase does not appear to be an organized movement, more an opportunistic circumstance.
5. Both support and opposition to the FI program within the community is well organized.
6. Opposition to the program is unlikely to be satisfied by any reorganization which continues to include French Immersion, and supporters of the program are continuing to look for unwavering commitment on the part of the Board and Administration.
7. There is a general anxiety and distrust of the District's intentions regarding FI, the small schools, the cross boundary attendance policy and this apprehension is aggravated as the population shrinks.
8. Staff turnover in the FI program is, and will continue to be a problem in the zone, as it is across the province.
9. The history of FI in the zone is one of uncertainty, creating anxiety among its supporters and providing hope to its detractors.
10. The overall combined effects of declining enrolment, amalgamation and the staffing requirements of the Provincial Collective Agreement have reduced what the zone is able to offer in terms of a previously enjoyed variety of programming options and opportunities for children. Much of this reduced opportunity is now being blamed on the continuation of the FI program alone.



## Part A.

### Community

Golden, situated at the head of the Columbia Valley and about three and one half-hours from Calgary by road, is a relatively small community of about 4000 persons. The population extends to 8000 if the outlying areas from Field to Parson are included. Approximately 1300 of these are of school age and are attending one of the public schools)

Significantly dependent on a variety of service industries (29%), retail (18%) and tourism businesses Golden also relies on tourism, lodging and forestry industries (about 10% each) for the foundation of its economic welfare. During the 1990's Golden was pleased to observe a significant growth in the accommodation sector of its business base. <sup>1</sup> **Currently it would seem that tourism holds the brightest prospects for growth.**

**Construction statistics for the same period, however, indicate a significant decline in the residential and commercial sectors.<sup>2</sup>**

Further research indicates the following:

1. Overall, the median age of the Thompson Okanagan region is significantly higher than the provincial median.
2. Quarterly regional statistics in 1998 indicated that the net migration inflows to this region would taper off.
3. The natural increase of births over deaths is falling and will continue to fall – becoming negative within the next 20 years.
4. Fertility rates (20-24, 25-29,) are also declining specifically in Health Area 18 (Golden), but increasing slightly in the 30-34 bracket.
5. Age distribution in Health Region #18 over the last 10 years.

1990	<u>Under 1</u>	<u>1-4</u>	<u>5-9</u>	<u>10-14</u>	<u>15-19</u>
Males	65	271	318	263	242
Females	62	251	322	250	251
<b>Total</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>513</b>	<b>493</b>
1995	<u>Under 1</u>	<u>1-4</u>	<u>5-9</u>	<u>10-14</u>	<u>15-19</u>
Males	57	221	333	305	263
Females	54	219	292	318	255
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>625</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>518</b>
1999	<u>Under 1</u>	<u>1-4</u>	<u>5-9</u>	<u>10-14</u>	<u>15-19</u>
Males	47	194	293	340	293
Females	46	206	285	255	302
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>595</b>

<sup>1</sup> Appendix B – #1 Community Profile p5

<sup>2</sup> ibid - #1 Community Profile p6

### Consultants' Observations

These figures indicate two trends:

1. The increase of 522 ages "1 yr.-4 yr." in 1990 to 625 ages "5yr. – 9yr." followed by a decrease to 595 ages ("10yr.-14 yr.") by 1999 indicates some in migration and out migration of the younger families in the area.
2. The overall decline within each age range 1990 – 1999 indicates a slight decline in overall younger family population.

### Population Projections – Health Area 18 Projections

<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
7832	7868	7905	7936	7962	7989	8008	8037	8071	8110	8147

So a general overall increase in population over the next 10 years may see some families with children return to the area.

Contrary to these somewhat optimistic indicators, the local regional health nurse provided the consultants with the following statistics:

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Births</u>
1995	95
1996	79
1997	94
1998	94
1999	87
2000	45 (to September 9, 2000)

Clearly these local figures, considered in isolation from any other influence, do not bode as well for future K enrolments. Future economic development may produce a more optimistic result.

### Major Sources of Income

Employment	Golden 72.8%	Provincial 66.3%
Pension	Golden 7.3%	Provincial 11.1%
Self Employment	Golden 3.8%	Provincial 5.2%

*n.b. there was a jump in self employment to 14.2% in 1994 then back down to 3.4% the following year.*

	<u>Golden</u>	<u>B.C.</u>
Accommodation/Food and Beverage	19.2%	8.2%
Retail Trade	11%	10.1%
Manufacturing Industry	10.3%	10.1%
Educational Service	.3%	6.7%
Logging and Forestry	7.1%	2%

Business Formations took a 1999 jump of 169.2% over 1998 from 13 new businesses in 1998 to 35 in 1999 – 22 new businesses.

**Consultants' Observations**

**Given the above it seems safe to suggest that Golden is not a “community in decline”, yet the school age population continues to decline, even slightly more than projected.**

**September of 2000 saw the schools open with 45 students less than the 1999/2000 total population for a September 2000 total of 1336.**

**The overall community, positioned as it is to receive benefit from general increased interest in tourism, particularly “adventure tourism”, those areas of the local economy now doing well will continue to expand.**

**There is significant if cautious optimism about the effects of the expansion of the “Kicking Horse” ski facility. Cautious, because the employment profile for such a facility may benefit accommodation, food, beverage and retail businesses but may not produce the kind of economic boost usually provided by families with children moving into and settling permanently in the area.**

**Quite the contrary, younger families seeking economic stability and the kind of income predictability needed to guarantee family prosperity may be moving to more predictable economic areas and still seek their fortunes in “boom” areas such as Calgary, only a few hours away.**



**Part B.****School District No. 6 – Golden Zone Schools**

Between 1996 and 2000, the overall student population declined from 1497.5 to 1336, a decline of 10.78%. Based on existing enrolments and trends for the last 2-3 years, a further decline to 1143 is predicted by 2004. According to local sources, continued uncertainty about the future of the area's major employers alongside a boom economy in neighbouring Calgary has contributed substantially to this decline. The area has been successful in attracting capital redevelopment for the existing ski hill. Local interests are optimistic about a "Whistler" type economic boom for the area, but are cautious as indicated in the previous section of this report, about predicting the ability of this development to attract young families with children as opposed to youthful seasonal workers.

**The consultants can find no reason to question these predictions.**

On a school by school basis the population changed as follows between 1996 and 2000

<b>School</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>2004</b>
Golden Secondary	559	511	-8.5%	455
Alexander Park (Eng.)	239.5	178	-25%	126
Alexander Park (Fr.)	59	47	-20.3%	50
Lady Grey Elem.	317	258	-18.61%	232
Edelweiss Primary (Fr.)	86	102.5	+19.2%	113
Nicholson Elem.	155	132	-14.8%	87
Columbia Valley (Parson)	55.5	43.5	-21.6%	36
Field Primary	14.5	10	-31%	13

N.B. calculating a % on a small N can be misleading given the actual change in student numbers.

**The growth at Edelweiss is directly related to the number of parents now opting to place their children in the French Immersion Program which Edelweiss supports exclusively from K-3.**

The report will address the French Immersion question under a separate heading. However, it should be noted that in the 2000/01 school year, approximately 200 students or 15% of the total zone population are currently involved in the program. This is an unusually high percentage for a District the size of the Golden Zone.

Parents, both FI and regular stream, attribute the FI program's attractiveness to a number of factors:

- There are long term employment advantages both locally (parks) and Federally to bilingualism.
- Edelweiss is a Primary School without older children and espouses a Primary Philosophy.

- Early bilingualism is felt to support early intellectual growth.
- Out of town parents wishing to enroll their children in town closer to work are not restricted by the area attendance policy.
- Many parents believe that there are fewer "special needs" students in the FI program.
- The FI program is believed to carry with it some sociocultural prestige.
- The existence of the program has enabled parents to exercise a "choice".

### **Capacities**

Each of the Golden Zone schools is assigned a Ministry of Education base and operating capacity as follows (counting each K as one half FTE student). Base Case differs from operating capacity in that it does not anticipate the continued implementation of the PCA. These **operating capacities** take into account the class size agreements in the Provincial Collective Agreement.

<b>School</b>	<b>Base Capacity</b>	<b>Oper.Capacity</b>	<b>Enrol.2000</b>
Golden Secondary (8-12)	550		511
Alexander Park (k-7)	225/40k	198/36k	225(178+47)
Lady Grey Elem. (k-7)	250/40k	220/36k	258
Edelweiss (k-3)	99	75/50K	75/50K
Nicholson (k-7)	128		132
Columbia Valley (k-7)	106		43.5
Field (k-3)	94		10

### **Consultants' Observations**

**All schools, therefore, with the exception of Columbia Valley and Field, are operating on or near their currently calculated capacities. Any planned population shift would need to take this into account.**

The Zone's CP-2 five year Capital Plan Summary indicates plans for minor access and/or mechanical upgrades for Nicholson and Edelweiss, as well as a minor upgrade to the multipurpose area at Golden Secondary and an "interior upgrade and code renovation" to Field Elementary.

No actual expansions are planned. While many schools throughout the province operate in excess of their nominal operating capacities, it could be said that Golden Schools, other than Columbia Valley and Field, are full. Portables can always be added, but usually this is at District cost if the increase in population is as a result of a local policy shift.

It is important to note that while schools populated beyond nominal capacities are not necessarily overcrowded, the Ministry of education's recent push to eliminate portable classrooms has influenced the capacity calculations. Within the last 5 years the Golden Zone has actually housed 200 more children than at the date of this report: October 2000. The reduced class sizes in the Provincial Collective Agreement created for many districts and for the Ministry, an overnight facilities crisis. The Ministry was aware that portables would not be an acceptable solution to this crisis.

It should also be noted that facilities planning is a very long term process. Requests made in, say, the Spring of 2001 might not actually see children in a new building for between 3-5 years, depending on the success of the requests and the provincial political situation of the day.

### **Attendance Boundary Policy**

The Board's current attendance area policy establishes its priorities as follows:

1. Students in a school's attendance area or who were in attendance at that school during the previous school year.
2. Students who wish to enroll in a specific program or for special health related needs which cannot be met in the student's "home" school.
3. Students whose siblings have been accepted under 1. or 2.
4. Primary students receiving before and after school child care outside the normal attendance area.
5. Other considerations include space available, the necessity for class reconfiguration, overcrowding and "exceptional circumstances".

### **Consultants' Observations**

**Some thought might be given to a relaxation of the School Attendance Area Policy No. 5000 which at this time is not fully understood by parents who work in Golden and who are wishing to bring their children to a larger "town" school with them. While 5000 1.(d) recognizes this need many parents seem to feel that the practice is discouraged.**



## **Part C.**

### **The French Immersion Program**

The Immersion program was instituted in the 1987/88 school year at the grade 1 level at Lady Grey Elementary.

In 1988/89 it expanded to grades 1 and 2.

In 1989/90 the program became a full K-3, still at Lady Grey.

In 1990/91 the K-1 program moved out to Nicholson, with the 2, 3 and 4's remaining at Lady Grey.

In 1991 the K,1,2,3 and 4 program moved again, this time to Edelweiss where the K-3 program is still resident. The grade 5 class remained at Lady Grey and by 1993/4 had become a grade 5-7 program.

In 1994/5 a grade 8 program was established at GSS with K-4 at Edelweiss and 5-7 at Lady Grey.

This arrangement continued until 1998/9 when the 5-7 program was moved yet again to Alexander Park Elementary.

The current configuration is:

Edelweiss K-4

Alexander Park 5-7

GSS 8-12.

This amount of movement and the concomitant uncertainty may explain in part why emotions and uncertainties are still strong in the community. Almost certainly it has contributed to the development of a "no more change" attitude on the part of almost every body except that group of parents who would simply like to see the FI program dropped "cold" and the children returned to their neighbourhood schools or schools of choice.

### **The Attrition Rate**

A major concern expressed to the consultants about the FI program is that there is an unacceptably high rate of return to the regular program stream. Opponents of the continuation of the FI program suggest that this is not only a comment on the program, but places an unnecessary burden on support services in the regular stream.

The attached spreadsheet, provided by the zone administration, is a breakdown of student movement from the program since 1987. It appears that the majority of students who left the FI program actually left the zone altogether. It was not possible to determine how many of the students returning to the regular stream in the zone required Learning Assistance or other support services. The only evidence was based on recollection of teachers involved and this was anecdotal with no clear support or denial of the concern.

In summary, and without clear data, it appears that since 1987, approximately 398 students have enrolled in the FI program. Since 1987, approximately 136 students have left the program, which at first glance appears to be a high attrition rate. However, 86 of these 136 have actually left the District altogether and not returned to the regular stream, 30 of whom are confirmed by transfer records as continuing in FI in their receiving district.

This attrition rate correlates positively with the Zone's overall attrition rate.

35 students during this period returned to the regular stream in the Golden zone, 4 others attended the alternate school, 5 others appear to have dropped out of school completely and the consultants have been unable to establish the subsequent placement of the remaining 6.

On the other side of the ledger, 26 students have entered the program "midstream" at various grade levels. (See attached Spreadsheet in Appendix A).

The numbers quoted here cannot be ascertained to be absolutely accurate to the single digit. The data submitted to the consultants by sources on either side of the FI issue, and by the zone administration provide enough consistency to leave the consultants comfortable quoting the figure above. The absence of complete records during the period may have led to some misunderstandings but generally speaking, the trends could be taken as accurate.

The attrition rate in the FI program then, appears to be generally consistent with the attrition rate in the zone. Since 1996, the attrition rate in the entire zone has been approximately 12.5%. The attrition rate in the much smaller sample (in FI) is not inconsistent with this.

Given the above, the consultants cannot agree that the attrition rate in the FI program is significantly different from the general rate of attrition in the larger population since 1996.

### **Consultants' Observations**

**During their research, the consultants read local newspaper articles dating back to 1986 through to 2000. In fact there were, at a minimum over that period, 74 news stories, approximately 40 letters to the editor and an average of 2 editorials each year. There has been much profile and discussion about this program. Many of the concerns, points of view and opinions of the program were repeated to the consultants during the extensive series of interviews in July of 2000. The French Immersion "Question" has formed the basis for significant division in this small community over a 14 year period.**

In 1995 a very thorough research project<sup>3</sup> by Dr. Carolyn Shields of UBC and Dr. Linda Rossler, then with the school district, examined the program in terms of equity, fairness and excellence of education. The study commented upon, but did not examine in detail the suggestion that the existence of the FI program was detracting from regular programs. The study did, however, clarify the funding issue and that information is still accurate.

The ostensible purpose of the Rossler research was to advise as to the viability of continuing the program on to grade 8. The decision was subsequently made to do so.

Another study done in the Windemere Zone and previously quoted here, found that, at the end, interest in the program at the K level did not warrant its initiation.




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<sup>3</sup> French Immersion Impact Review – Appendix B

**Part C.**  
**School Reconfiguration Options**

Several options for zone reconfiguration are under discussion within the community. Consideration has been given to several possible configurations. One proposal, discussed frequently with the consultants, is the idea of introducing a middle school structure by reorganizing the elementary school populations and using an existing elementary school as a middle school.

At the heart of concerns expressed by a number of parents is the increasing number of “split grade” classes in the regular stream. It is important to note that a combination of declining enrolment in many districts, the Provincial Collective Agreement and amalgamations have increased the number of “split classes” to the point that they are now the norm across the province. In fact 35-50% of elementary classes in the province are multi age groupings. This has become the norm.

All provincial programs, including the K-12 plan, recognize that multi age grouping is a step to recognizing the needs of individual students in any classroom. Even a so-called “straight grade” will always contain students operating at more than a single grade level. In fact many districts are now discovering that the assumption that all grade 12 students should be completing their programs on June 30 of a given year is an erroneous assumption which does not recognize student success as a main goal of the system. Students tend to progress at their own appropriate rate: some finish early and some take longer but the old age for grade assumptions are no longer widely regarded as being the prime indicator of student success.

It should be noted that the current school based budgeting process, which might create “winners” and/or “losers” in any reconfiguration scenario, drives a further concern of school personnel about reconfiguration. This, along with concerns about the fragility of the culture of some schools came through quite clearly in the Windemere Report.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the Windemere report gave consideration to the implementation of an FI program prior to start up. That is to say, the Windemere Report does not examine a fully established program.

The Consultants have examined several of the options in order to respond to the mandate of the original report request.

**Option #1 - The Middle School Option**

Educationally, middle schools have met with much success in the area of child growth and development. This has been accompanied by parent/community approval in those districts throughout the province where Middle Years schooling has taken hold. The consultants are aware of the successes of Saanich, Coquitlam, Sooke, Cowichan

<sup>4</sup> French Immersion Feasibility Study, Windemere Zone, S.D.#6 – October 1998

Valley, New Westminster and others with this form of organization. Middle Schools most commonly support the needs of students in grades 6,7 and 8 covering an early puberty age range of 11 to 13 years of age. Children at this age are experiencing unique changes in their growth and development patterns which require special understanding. Schools are organized and timetabled in familial or “pods” to enable a “team” of teachers to focus on the individual needs of each “pod” of children.

The successes of these schools, however, depend on the ability of the school to offer a wider range of options and the implementation of an informed belief system on the part of the professionals.

The success of a middle school is also significantly dependent on the school holding an optimum population of 400-600 students. This, in turn, provides a staff of 20-30 teachers who provide the organizational options, both curricular and extra curricular.

Population projections for the Golden Zone grades 6-8 are as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Grades 6-8</u>
2000	328
2001	315
2002	292
2003	288
2004	260

These enrolment numbers would produce staffing levels which would substantially restrict the ability of such a middle school to realize its potential.

**In addition, the removal of grade 8 from Golden Secondary School (GSS) would produce populations as follows:**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Grades 9-12</u>
2000	457
2001	424
2002	423
2003	424
2004	404

These enrolment numbers would also restrict the ability of GSS to offer the range of program options it currently provides.

Within the context of the Middle School option, the consultants also looked at the possibility of a grade 5-7 Middle School which would not impact on the enrolment of G.S.S.

In this case the projections are as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Grades 5-7</u>
2000	329
2001	301
2002	304
2003	276
2004	264

So the Grade 5-7 Middle School option, while not as educationally sound a venture as the grades 6-8, produces no more viable a population either in terms of size of middle school. Removing the grade 5's also has a negative effect on both Columbia Valley Elementary and Nicholson Elementary, leaving Columbia Valley in the mid to low 30's and Nicholson in the low 90's to low 80's.

**Consultants' Observations**

**The Middle School idea is an example of what could be called "the baker's dilemma": too much yeast for one loaf and not enough flour for two loaves.**



## **Option #2 - Elementary Reorganization**

There has been discussion within the community about the possibility of a reorganization of elementary schools. As has been indicated above, the schools as currently configured are operating at or above Ministry of Education capacities and there are no current proposals before the Ministry for major facilities expansions.

The two smallest schools, Field (10 students K-3) and Columbia Valley at Parson (43.5), would appear to be considerations for reorganization at first glance. Little, if anything, would be gained by the closure of these schools however.

Quite the contrary. Because of the structure of the grant system the zone would more than likely lose money by such closures.

Many districts discovered this subsequent to the late '90's amalgamation process which, at the end of it all, accomplished only some reductions in central office staff and the number of trustees and a reduction in overall funding.

The grant structure itself still supported the maintenance of schools down to populations of 7 students.

While Field is close to this number, subjecting 10 children ages 5-8 to lengthy bus rides on the Trans Canada Highway in winter would not likely find much support within the community.

The same could be said of the small school in Parson.

The "town" schools, Alexander Park, Lady Grey and Edelweiss do present some possibilities.

## **Elementary Reconfiguration Options**

What then, is possible? Given the uncertainty about enrolment over the next 5-year period, but given also that for the 2000/01 school year the current decline trend appears to be continuing at a rate approximating 3% per year, some consideration of reconfiguration might be advisable. Reconfiguration is limited, for the reasons outlined above, to the "town schools".

The uncertainty of the local economy, even within the time of the preparation of this report, cannot be ignored. The consultants believe that the further reduction in the number of shifts at Evans Forest Products during the summer of 2000 may have aggravated the trend towards decline in student population, even beyond that which had been originally predicted.

It should be noted that the Ministry of Education now continues to predict a continued decline in student numbers provincially.

If it is the intention of the zone to continue to provide the most flexible and adaptable form of organization within this declining enrolment scenario, and the consultants believe that this is the Board's intention and the wish of parents, then some room for movement needs to be created.

As an example, if the current trend did continue the total grade enrolments at Alexander Park, Lady Grey and Edelweiss (including FI numbers) would change as follows:

Year	Primary Grades	Intermediate Grades
2000	232+73K's	317
2001	207+76K's	304

### **Elementary Reconfiguration Option #1**

Some concern has been expressed that the original decision to run Edelweiss as a single-track FI primary was a flawed decision. The "separate" nature of the school has led to perceptions of elitism and segregation. Suitable and adequate administration is also a challenge.

This latter issue relates to the difficulty the District has experienced in finding and hiring a bilingual administrator with an appropriately strong primary background. The District/Zone cannot place a non-bilingual non-teaching administrator in a school of that size, and the compromise, a part time administrator who is offsite the rest of the time has led to justified concerns from parents and teachers.

Should either Edelweiss or Alexander Park or both become home(s) to a dual track primary program? Is that solution feasible given the capacities of the two buildings and the enrolments projected? Let us revisit the numbers.

<b>School</b>	<b>Base Capacity</b>	<b>Oper.Capacity</b>	<b>Enrol.2000</b>
Golden Secondary (8-12)	550		511
Alexander Park (k-7)	225/40k	198/36k	225
Lady Grey Elem. (k-7)	250/40k	220/36k	258
Edelweiss (k-3)	99	75/50k	99
Nicholson (k-7)	128		132
Columbia Valley (k-7)	106		43.5
Field (k-3)	94		10

This reconfiguration to two dual track primary schools would allow the district more flexibility in balancing the distribution of its primary regular stream and French Immersion enrolments. There are, after all, a significant number (34) APE primary children currently attending Edelweiss.

**In the '99/00 school year there are 34 Alexander Park students attending Edelweiss.**

**By 2001/2002 Edelweiss capacity will reduce to 59/36K**

## **Elementary Reconfiguration Option #2**

If the first option proves, for whatever reason, logistically too disruptive, a second approach would be to reconfigure to two K-3 schools, one single track French Immersion and the other a single track regular stream school.

Theoretically then, with the grade 4 FI students moving from Edelweiss to Lady Grey in September of 2001, it would be possible to reconfigure Alexander Park Elementary as a K-3 Regular Program school of approximately 184 + 51K students.

Lady Grey would then operate as a grades 4-7 dual track school of 308 students (including FI) with 11 classrooms and an operating capacity of 275. An additional classroom may be needed.

If French Immersion Kindergarten enrolments continue at the current levels, and APES were to become normal program K-3, with Edelweiss K-3 FI, the grade 4's having moved to Lady Grey as in Elementary Option #1, then the numbers would look like this:

2001										
<b>School</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>O/C</b>
APES	39	36	53	43					132/39	198/36
EES.	38	38	24	17					79/38	99
LGES					92	71	68	75	306s	275

These numbers could be accommodated in the existing facilities with the provision of some space at Lady Grey and would alleviate the increasing pressure on Edelweiss.

This option provides the zone with some "breathing space" to see if the currently established trend towards further decline will continue, or, as other statistics seem to indicate, may level off.

## **A Third Elementary Option**

Should enrolments continue to decline and should the decreased birth rate eventually reduce the overall K population and subsequently the enrolment in Primary grades, it would seem advisable to consider reconfiguring to two dual track schools with Alexander Park housing the dual track Primary children and Lady Grey the Intermediate students. Edelweiss would then become a redundant facility.

### **Consultants' Observations**

**Given the overcrowding at Edelweiss, and the buildup of other problems mentioned above, it would seem reasonable to redistribute the sum of both the Edelweiss and Alexander Park populations. This would make both Edelweiss and Alexander Park dual track Primary schools with a view to**

eventually, should enrolment decline further, moving to a single dual track Primary and a dual track Intermediate school.

With Lady Grey becoming a dual track school, grades 4-7, its operating capacity increases because of the higher intermediate class sizes in the PCA. If Lady Grey had no K's, its operating capacity as a dual track intermediate grades 4-7 school becomes 275 with 11 classrooms.<sup>5</sup> One additional classroom may be needed.

There is some hope here but only if the District/Zone reserves the right to redistribute some children based on the capacities of the buildings to accommodate.



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<sup>5</sup> Based on figures provided in October/00 by Steve Jackson

### **Elementary Option #4 - Return French Immersion Children to Their Home Schools**

It was not the mandate of this report to enter the "French Immersion" debate. Nonetheless, concerns were expressed by a number of those interviewed that the loss of some "home school" students to the centralized FI program resulted in loss of resources and organizational difficulties for those school losing students to the French Immersion Program. It was suggested that the decision should be made to drop the FI program and return students immediately to their "home" schools.

This option presupposes the immediate elimination of the Primary and Intermediate F.I. program. This would be a political decision, made bearing in mind that a significant percentage of the student population (around 15%) would be affected, and also taking into consideration that the parents of these children may make the case that a commitment had been made on behalf of their children.

Some recent jurisprudence may prove them correct.

The following figures are generally agreed upon by sources on both sides of the FI issue and by Zone administration.

At this time the schools' FI distribution is as follows:

<b><u>School</u></b>	<b><u>FI students</u></b>	<b><u>Redist. Enrol</u></b>	<b><u>Capacity</u></b>
LGES	69	258+69=327	220+40K
APES	63	178+65=243	219+40K
NES	26	132+26=158	88+40K
CVES	10	43.4+10=53.4	66+40K
EES	103.5	Now Empty	59+40K

The question as to whether these numbers would reduce the number of multi-grade splits necessary to meet PCA staffing requirements would still depend on a number of other influential factors. Whatever happened there would be significant disruption to the lives of a large number of students. Receiving "home" schools would be overcrowded.

While some parents have expressed concern that the loss of FI children to a school is forcing multigrade splits, there is no certainty in the minds of the consultants that returning the FI children would produce any better class organization, since PCA class size is only the initial determiner of school organization.

Given the above it would be necessary to reorganize all school populations and boundaries except for the school in Parson which would gain 12 students and still remain well under capacity. Presumably, however, the Parson FI parents would resist such a move and may still wish to bring/place their children to a "town" school. This issue has not been specifically raised with those parents.

Not only that, but the real potential exists for children to be moved to schools out of their neighbourhood attendance zone, or alternatively be accommodated in libraries, gyms or surplus portables.

### **Consultants' Observations**

**During the interviews with parents, administrators and community representatives, considerable anxiety was expressed by all that “yet another” reorganization of the schools, involving the movement of large numbers of children from their schools of choice should be avoided if possible.**



### **Option #4 – Introduce Late French Immersion**

This option assumes that those students already enrolled in early FI would continue until such time as they reach the late FI initial year. During this period there would be no new enrollments in early immersion after September 2000.

There are several possibilities within this option, all related to the grade level at which late FI would begin:

1. Late FI beginning at the Gr.6 level, which is the traditional start up year. This would see an intake at one school of new Gr.6 FI students in the September of the 2006 school year. At this point the zone would have two distinct immersion programs running in parallel until 2012 at which point both groups would graduate leaving a late immersion program as the zone's FI offering.
2. Late immersion beginning at the Grade 8 level which would require two programs for 5 years until 2012 – see Option #4A
3. Immediate cancellation of the early immersion program and immediate institution of a late FI program which would see those students in grade 6 in the 2000 school year carry on and a new “late” intake in 2001. The district would still need to run parallel programs for several years. This option would also produce a version of the “reorganization” referred to in Option #3

All of these options are likely to provoke some controversy within the community in the form of reaction from FI parents. It is difficult for the consultants to weight the consequences of this reaction against any gains made. The decision would be more political than educational in terms of rationale for the change.

### **Option #4A – Begin Late Immersion at Grade 8**

This is a variation of Option #4 and had been suggested by some parents. It has been done in some districts. Some years ago, in 1988 the then Shuswap S.D.#79 began FI at grade 8 because the majority of elementary schools were spread out through a considerable geographic area and there was no central school which would have satisfactorily housed an FI program accessible to all students in the district. Grade 8 was the first time the majority of students were bused “into town”.

Educationally, the results, even after two years, justified the decision and the program is still in operation and well subscribed. Students graduate with a “French Dogwood”.

Given that the large elementary schools in the Golden Zone are “town” schools, the geographic imperative does not apply. Further, a phasing out of the FI program over the coming 7 years may see some overcrowding at “town” elementary schools as has already been indicated.

**Consultants' Observations**

**If, during the coming years, enrolment continues to decline beyond projections, say below 1000 students to choose an arbitrary figure, this may well be an option worth considering since it does not remove the FI option from the zone and still provides the bilingual opportunity. In good faith the commitment now in place to the 2000 Kindergarten FI students should be fulfilled.**

**In the meantime a "cap" based on a percentage of K enrolment could be applied, bearing in mind that the "cap" should take into account general declining enrolment and guarantee a feasible enrolment for that year moving through to graduation.**



### **Summary of Findings:**

✓Projecting enrolment in any school district is a tricky business. In strictly urban areas, where mailing addresses are the same as street addresses, certain StatsCan methodologies are reasonable accurate. In rural areas, where mailing addresses are not the same as street addresses the whole matter of projecting enrolment becomes more of an educated guess.

✓Two years ago, the provincial government, which probably has more access to family, health and educational data than anyone else – and the systems to process the data was wrong in its estimates by nearly 10,000 students. Enrolment had declined dramatically across the province but nobody knew until the schools opened in September and the students did not show up.

✓In the Golden zone, there is cause for cautious, very cautious optimism. There has been a decline in recent years, but so has there been province wide. Government data indicates population decline as leveling off. In a time of change, projecting on the trends of the previous five years, or even of the previous three years can be misleading.

✓The safest projection in a time of change is probably year by year using the “cohort survival” method assuming, for example, that most grade 3’s will show up in grade 4. That, combined with local knowledge about the number of 4-year-old children will probably be as accurate as any other method. In other words, as always, it is best to hope for the best but plan for the worst.

✓The consultants continue to be extremely impressed with the variety of educational options already offered to a relatively small population. Any form of reorganization should be careful not to “throw the baby out with the bath water”.

In fact local projections for the September 2000 school year have proven about as accurate as possible, if slightly optimistic. This being the case it is possible to state the following:

1. A serious consideration of reconfiguration with the “town” schools appears inevitable since student population numbers in the Golden Zone appear to be continuing to decline at a rate of approximately a 3% per year.
2. The existence of the small schools in Parson and Field do not represent an economic drain on the zone. The continued viability of these schools will depend on local population, but at this stage there appears to nothing to be gained by considering closure of these schools.
3. The size differential between the “town” schools and the rural schools creates the appearance, but not necessarily the fact of imbalance.

4. There is no substantial evidence to suggest that the existence of a well subscribed French Immersion program in the Golden Zone represents anything except the provision of choice in a relatively small population.
5. The Immersion program does not detract in any substantial or empirical sense from the District's ability to offer a solid regular stream program.
6. Should significant changes in the local economy provoke an unexpected further decline in population, say below 900 students, it may be wise to consider the implications of phasing out the early immersion program and maintaining the French Immersion Choice with a late Immersion program beginning in grade 6 or grade 8.
7. At this time in the life of the school district, dramatic changes in the configuration of the school population may be premature and very unsettling. Both for students and parents.

The Middle School concept does not appear to be viable because of the relatively small school this configuration would produce. Secondly, this option does nothing to assist the small schools, Nicholson, Columbia Valley and Field and may well be detrimental to the ability of GSS to sustain its variety of programs.



**Recommendations:**

1. Uncertainty about the future of the current early immersion program appears to be fuelling a local controversy, which has been alive for thirteen years. Some clear indication by the Board of School Trustees as to what its intentions are for, say, the next six years may be needed in order to put the controversy to rest.
2. The small rural schools, Field and Columbia Valley are facts of life. Nothing is to be gained by considering closure.
3. The most viable short to mid-term solution would appear to be elementary reconfiguration option which provides two dual track Primary schools and a dual track Intermediate school .
4. The District should align its current population with a vigorous Capital Development program because of reduced capacities resulting from the Provincial Collective Agreement.
5. Parents and staff might well wish to visit other K-3 schools in the District in order to review the advantages of this configuration.



## Appendix A

Option #1 - If K enrolments return to "normal"  
 N.B. Current Space Availability Probably O.K.

Assumption - APES Primary Reg:

EES Primary FI:

LGES Dual Intermediate

### Projections

based on

Sept 2000

figures

K Enrolments return to 1999 levels

<u>2001</u> <u>School</u>	<u>K</u>	<u>Gr 1</u>	<u>Gr 2</u>	<u>Gr 3</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Plus</u> <u>K</u>	<u>Gr 4</u>	<u>Gr 5</u>	<u>Gr 6</u>	<u>Gr 7</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Plus</u> <u>K</u>	<u>Capacity</u>	<u>Space</u>
APES	51	36	54	43	133	51					133	51	225 + 40	Room Plus
EES	26	39	22	16	77	26					77	26	75 + 40	Possible
LGES Reg.							66	54	54	67	241			
LGES FI							28	17	8	14	67			
Total											308		250 + 40	OK
<b><u>2002</u></b>														
APES	50	49	35	51	135	50					135	50	225 + 40	Room Plus
EES	25	27	35	20	82	25					82	25	75 + 40	Possible
LGES Reg.							45	70	48	50	213			
LGES FI							13	20	13	14	60			
Total											273		250 + 40	OK
<b><u>2003</u></b>														
APES	48	48	50	33	131	48					131	48	198 + 40	Room Plus
EES	24	27	25	33	85	24					85	24	59 + 40	Portable?
LGES Reg.							53	48	62	43	206			
LGES FI							16	12	18	12	58			
Total											264		220 + 40	OK
<b><u>2004</u></b>														
APES	42	46	49	47	142	42					142	42	198 + 40	Room Plus
EES	22	26	24	23	73	22					73	22	59 + 40	Portable?
LGES Reg.							34	56	43	56	189			
LGES FI							26	15	11	16	68			
Total											257		220 + 40	OK

## Possibility to split Reg. Gr 4s between APES and LGES

Elementary	K	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Total	Plus K	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Gr 7	Total	Plus K
<b>Enrolment All Schools</b>												
2001	97	87	90	80	257	97	113	97	100	103	413	97
2002	94	99	82	85	266	94	76	116	90	92	374	94
2003	91	95	95	78	268	91	82	78	107	82	349	91
2004	81	92	92	91	275	81	70	85	72	98	325	81

If trends true, primary increases and intermediate decreases  
 Option #2 - If K FI enrolments remain high  
 N.B. Additional Space Would Be Needed At Edelweiss

Projections based on Sept 2000 figures

Assumption - APES Primary Reg.:

EES Primary FI:

LGES Dual Intermediate

K Enrolments remain at 2000 levels -HIGH  
and FI K Continues High

<u>2001</u> School	K	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Total	Plus K	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Gr 7	Total	Plus K	Capacity	
APES	39	36	54	43	133	51					133	51	225 + 40	Room Plus
EES	38	39	22	16	77	26					77	26	75 + 40	Portable?
Total	77	75	76	59	210						210			
LGES Reg.							66	54	54	67	241			
LGES FI							28	17	8	14	67			
Total							94	71	62	81	308		250 + 40	OK
<u>2002</u>														
APES	40	37	35	51	123	50					123	50	225 + 40	Room Plus
EES	35	39	35	20	94	25					94	25	75 + 40	Portable?
Total	75	76	70	71	217									
LGES Reg.							45	70	48	50	213			
LGES FI							13	20	13	14	60			
Total							58	90	61	64	273		250 + 40	OK
<u>2003</u>														
APES	36	40	38	33	111	48					111	48	198 + 40	Room Plus
EES	36	35	37	33	105	24					105	24	59 + 40	Need Space
Total	72	75	75	66	216						216			
LGES Reg.							53	48	62	43	206			
LGES FI							16	12	18	12	58			
Total							69	60	80	55	264		220 + 40	OK
<u>2004</u>														
APES	32	46	39	36	121	42					121	42	198 + 40	Room Plus
EES	32	32	34	34	100	22					100	22	59 + 40	Need Space
Total	64	78	73	70	221									
LGES Reg.							34	56	43	56	189			
LGES FI							26	15	11	16	68			
Total							60	71	54	72	257		220 + 40	OK

## Possibility to split Reg. Gr 4s between APES and LGES

## "Small" School Enrolments

<u>School</u>	<u>K</u>	<u>Gr 1</u>	<u>Gr 2</u>	<u>Gr 3</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Plus</u> <u>K</u>	<u>Gr 4</u>	<u>Gr 5</u>	<u>Gr 6</u>	<u>Gr 7</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Plus</u> <u>K</u>	<u>Capacity</u>
<u>2001</u>													
CVES	3	4	2	7			6	6	9	6	41.5		
FES	4	2	2	3							9		
NES	13	6	10	12			19	22	22	22	119.5		
Total	20	12	14	22			25	28	31	28	170		
<u>2002</u>													
CVES	3	5	4	2			6	7	7	8	40.5		
FES	4	4	2	2							10		
NES	13	13	5	11			12	20	22	21	110.5		
Total	20	22	11	15			18	27	29	29	161		
<u>2003</u>													
CVES	3	5	5	5			2	6	7	6	37.5		
FES	3	4	4	2							11.5		
NES	12	12	12	6			11	12	19	21	99		
Total	18	21	21	13			13	18	26	27	148		
<u>2004</u>													
CVES	3	5	5	5			4	2	7	7	36.5		
FES	3	4	4	3							12.5		
NES	11	12	11	12			6	11	12	18	87.5		
Total	17	21	20	20			10	13	19	25	136.5		

Grade Projections Using Option #2 Enrolments

2001	97	87	90	81			119	99	93	109	420		
2002	95	98	81	86			82	78	106	82	348		
2003	90	96	96	79			82	78	106	82	348		
2004	81	99	93	90			70	84	73	97	324		
Elementary	<u>K</u>	<u>Gr 1</u>	<u>Gr 2</u>	<u>Gr 3</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Plus</u> <u>K</u>	<u>Gr 4</u>	<u>Gr 5</u>	<u>Gr 6</u>	<u>Gr 7</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Plus</u> <u>K</u>	
<u>Enrolment</u>													
<u>All Schools</u>													
2001	97	87	90	80	257	97	113	97	100	103	413	97	
2002	94	99	82	85	266	94	76	116	90	92	374	94	
2003	91	95	95	78	268	91	82	78	107	82	349	91	
2004	81	92	92	91	275	81	70	85	72	98	325	81	
<u>FI</u>													
<u>Enrolments</u>													
<u>if 2000 a blip</u>													
2001	26	39	22	16	77	26	21	14	15	7	57	26	<i>Total</i> 134
2002	25	27	35	20	82	25	13	20	13	14	60	25	142
2003	24	27	25	33	85	24	16	12	18	12	58	24	143
2004	22	26	24	23	73	22	26	15	11	16	68	22	141
<u>FI</u>													
<u>Enrolments</u>													
<u>if not a blip</u>													
2001	38	39	22	16	77	38	21	14	15	7	57	38	134
2002	35	39	35	20	94	35	13	20	13	14	60	35	154
2003	36	35	37	33	105	36	16	12	18	12	58	36	163
2004	32	32	34	34	100	32	26	15	11	16	68	32	168