



# *School District No. 54* (BULKLEY VALLEY)

*"To empower all learners to live the challenges of a diverse and changing world."*

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January 8, 2021

Dear Houston School Community Member:

It is with disappointment that I am writing this letter to you today. The School District was hoping to have an in-person community discussion about the upcoming grade reconfigurations at the two Elementary Schools in Houston. Unfortunately, due to the local COVID situation and current Provincial guidelines, we have decided to reach out to the Houston school community in this manner instead. Sharing our rationale with the wider community was not something we wanted to delay any longer (the original community meeting was scheduled for the end of November). Written communication is absolutely not our first choice for dialogue with the community. We do hope however that you will take the time to share with us any comments, suggestions or concerns that you may have about the reconfiguration.

With this letter I have included a power point slideshow that we were going to work through at our public meeting. The information in the slideshow reviews some of the history leading up to the decision and the educational rationale for our reconfiguration. Included is a slide with some suggestions, feedback and concerns we have already collected from our school staffs as they participated in a similar presentation in October. Much of the information in the slides detailing the benefits of the reconfiguration come from school Administration who are very much aware of the educational and social emotional benefits of this change.

While there are many details in the presentation for you to read, I can summarize a few key points for our decision. Reconfiguring of Houston schools has been a discussion item in the educational community for many years in Houston – 20 plus years. The District believes that with the current Silverthorne upgrades focusing on daycare spaces, before and after school care and a Strongstart space, it is the right time to shift the focus of the school to Early Learning. The School District strongly believes that creating a Primary/ Early Learning Center at Silverthorne will benefit all primary students. In addition, all intermediate students (Gr.4-7) in Houston will benefit from the campus program that already exists between Houston Secondary and Twain Sullivan Elementary. Currently the intermediate students at Silverthorne Elementary miss out on some educational opportunities which put them at a disadvantage as they enter grade 8.

The District is committed to providing the best educational experience for all of the students in Houston and it is without reservation that we have recommended the grade reconfiguration at the schools. At the same time, we do understand that change in schools is sometimes difficult for people and that there are some potential consequences for individual families. Please go through the information in the slides and if you have any comments that you want to share please feel free to send them to us at: [contact-sd54@sd54.ca](mailto:contact-sd54@sd54.ca) . Of course, if you have any questions or comments that you would like a personal discussion about, feel free to speak to your local School Principal about these topics as they are actively leading this school change process.

Stay safe and thanks for sharing any comments you may have.

Mike McDiarmid  
Superintendent of Schools  
School District No.54 (Bulkley Valley)

# Realigning schools in Houston- Fall 2021

Nov. 2020



School District No.54  
(Bulkeley Valley)



# Reviewing the Process...



RECENT  
HISTORY



OPPORTUNITY



LOGISTICS

## Recent History



**Significant Declining Enrollment** in Houston has been occurring for many years and 2020 Enrollments now sit at:

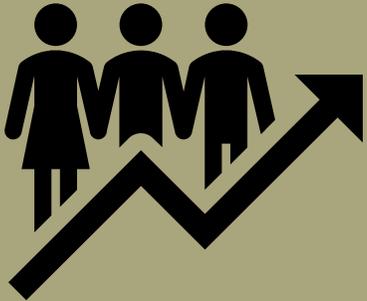
HSS 184      Silverthorne 155      Twain Sullivan 174

Each school's capacity:

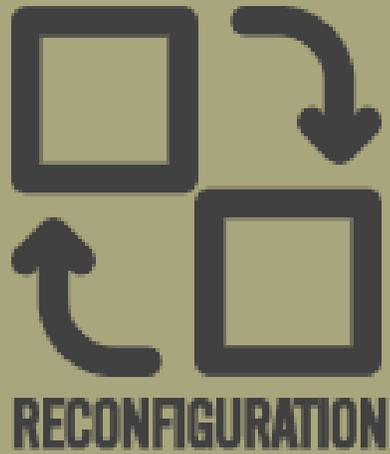
HSS 400 (46%)      Silverthorne 300 (52%)      Twain Sullivan 290 (60%)

As Silverthorne is our oldest school in Houston (built in 1954), annual facilities reviews have historically considered the closure of Silverthorne. It would be fiscally responsible to close it given declining enrolment.

# Opportunity



- Last year the District was made aware of a **Provincial Government grant to increase daycare facilities** in communities. After consultations with early childhood representatives in Houston, a decision was made to apply for the grant:
  - There is a need for more daycare space in the community.
  - The daycare ensures the capacity issue at Silverthorne is addressed.
  - Funds could also be used to upgrade the entire facility.
- **1.4 million dollars in grant money to refurbish Silverthorne...** now underway. Set to open September 2021. Given MCFD funding, the District has chosen to proceed with providing space for Stongstart, daycare (0-5 yrs) and before and after school care. The childcare programs will be managed under a lease agreement and will be operated under the jurisdiction of a not-for-profit society.



## **Reconfiguration of grades** added to the plans for refurbishment of Silverthorne:

- Reconfiguring of schools has been a discussion item for many years in Houston – 20 plus years
- Timely with current upgrades to Silverthorne focused on early learning
- All intermediate students (Gr.4-7) in Houston will benefit from the campus program between HSS and Twain Sullivan
- Creating space for a Primary/ Early Learning Center at Silverthorne will benefit primary students

# Overall Opportunities

- **Class size and Composition** - greater number of straight-grade classes. Improved class-size & composition balancing.
- **Reduce School Perceived Inequity** - All Houston intermediate students will have access to programming at HSS. Significant educational and social benefits for students.
- **Professional Development & specialization of staffing** – Teacher professional development and collaboration will be more focused with more teachers from the same grade at each site to work and learn with.
- **Single-site Resources** - Equipment and resources specific to developmental levels and physical size (inside and outside)
- **Repurpose Savings** - to greater educational programming, resources, staffing, ...
- **Specialty educators** - could work within one facility.

# Educational and programing benefits to a Primary/Early Learning configuration at Silverthorne...



- Greater Early Learning focus for *Professional Learning*
  - A Learning plan that targets the needs of younger children – academically/ socially/ emotionally – health and wellbeing
  - A greater opportunity for collaboration with colleagues that are teaching at similar grade levels – better able to exchange ideas and pedagogical choices that have the greatest impact on early learners
  - A recognition that the needs of younger children are different than those of intermediate children
  - A more focused response to students from 0-8 based on the Early Learning Framework
  - Greater opportunity to co-plan and co-teach together
  - Less isolation for a single level teacher in a building

# Educational and programming benefits to a Primary/Early Learning configuration at Silverthorne...



- Continued...
- Safe, cohesive, *early (0-8years) child-centred learning spaces* that greatly impact early child development
  - Increased flexibility in placing students in different cohorts of the same level
  - Better able to match students with teaching styles
  - Equipment and resources specific to developmental levels and physical size (inside and outside)
  - Greater choice for relationships amongst students and staff based on personal and professional interests
  - The opportunity to create and implement school practices that create an environment that better enhances and supports quality practice and children's development throughout the early learning years

# Educational and programing benefits to a Primary/Early Learning configuration at Silverthorne...



- Continued...
- A common vision that can be narrowed to focus on *early learning*
  - A greater ability to support children as they transition into a more formal school setting
  - A more focused approach to the Early learning framework and the value of play-based learning
  - An increased opportunity for school leadership at a younger age
  - Increased continuity and quality of learning across all early learning settings and levels within the Early Learning Framework
  - Increased availability, accessibility and participation in early learning programs
  - A continuum of care – a focus for caregiver and child learning through the formative early years – that will help to ensure children’s developmental outcomes as they move through the early and primary years

Educational and  
programing  
benefits to a  
Grade 4-12  
Campus School...



- ***Student Success***

- Increased familiarity with the high school for all grade 4-7 learners
- Greater equity, fairness, and access to diverse programing and facility usage for all grade 4-12 learners in Houston
- Increased grade transition success for grade 7-8 learners
- Staff will be familiar with all students in the campus school - facilitating more successful grade to grade transitions and knowledge sharing
- Enhanced learner experience by opening up access to all facilities and elective options
- More options for student placement in classes – finding the “best fit”

Educational and  
programming  
benefits to a  
Grade 4-12  
Campus School...



Continued...

- ***Professional Learning & Staff Collaboration***
  - Creating a “whole school” approach with a common vision to learning and teaching from grades 4-12
  - Combining departments to enhance staff teamwork and sharing
  - Opportunities to build/create multi-year programming for students and course subjects/content
  - A coordinated learning plan that targets the academic, social, emotional, and health and wellbeing of all students
  - A greater opportunity for collaboration with colleagues that are teaching at similar grade levels – better able to exchange ideas and pedagogical choices that have the greatest impact on learners
  - A recognition that the needs of intermediate and high school aged students is different than students in grades K-3
  - Greater opportunity to co-plan and co-teach together
  - Less staff/teacher isolation as all staff will have a colleague teaching a similar subject and/or grade level

Educational and  
programming  
benefits to a  
Grade 4-12  
Campus School...



Continued...

- ***Structural Opportunities***

- Coordinating and combining supports to enhance student experience and success
- More opportunities for innovative staff assignments and/or teaching teams for intermediate and secondary
- Greater efficiency in providing student support as resources can be used more effectively to a less diverse age range of learners
- Coordinated budgeting to effectively allocate and target resources
- Combined campus staffing for more effective scheduling and timetabling according to student need and staff skillset
- Equipment and resources can be shared to maximize access for students (trades, foods, athletics, technology)

## Potential challenges we have heard about...

- Possible transportation logistics and cost?
  - Costs will be negligible, and buses can be rerouted with enough planning time
- Space in Silverthorne?
  - We anticipate the same number of divisions at both schools
- Complexity of re-alignment of staff?
  - Schools and the District will have time to work out the transition details
- Less choice for students to attend different facility
- Greater distance to downtown core amenities for intermediate (e.g. pool, skating...)
- Food programs?
- Some families concerned that not all of their children will be at one school
- Logistics of moving resources and equipment
- Ensuring students and staff are made to feel welcome at new schools

# What do you think?

Opportunities...

Challenges...

Logistics...

Please submit your comments to : [contact-sd54@sd54.bc.ca](mailto:contact-sd54@sd54.bc.ca)