



# **BOUNDARY & GRADE CONFIGURATION PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

**What We Heard: Open House & Online Survey  
May 17 – 30, 2022  
Final Report**

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June 16, 2022

**Wolf Creek Public Schools / BOUNDARY & GRADE CONFIGURATION REVIEW**  
**What We Heard: Open House & Online Survey, May 17 – 30, 2022**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....3

I. INTRODUCTION

    I.1. Consultation Process, Phases & Timing .....5

    I.2. Open Houses.....6

    I.3. Online Survey .....6

II. ABOUT PARTICIPANTS .....7

III. ALTERNATIVES FEEDBACK

    III.1. A-1; EXPANDED BOUNDARY WITH 2(K-5), 1(6-8), 1(9-12) .....8

    III.2. A-2; EXPANDED BOUNDARY WITH 2(K-3), 1(4-6), 1(7-12) .....9

    III.3. B-1; NO EXPANDED BOUNDARY WITH 2(K-5), 1(6-8), 1(9-12) .....9

    III.4. B-2; NO EXPANDED BOUNDARY WITH 2(K-3), 1(4-6), 1(7-12) .....10

IV. ALTERNATIVES RANK ORDERING RESULTS .....10

V. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT COMMUNICATION EVALUATION.....11

**Boundary and Grade Configuration**  
**Phase II Public Consultation: May 17 – 30, 2022**  
**What We Heard Report**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Two Open Houses and an Online Survey took place in May 2022 to obtain public feedback regarding alternatives for a new school boundary and adjusted grade configurations for schools in Blackfalds and a new boundary for the Lacombe schools. A total of thirty-nine (39) individuals attended the Open Houses, both held from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on May 17, 2022, in Blackfalds at Iron Ridge Junior Campus and on May 18, 2022, in Lacombe at Lacombe Composite High School.

An online survey, via Bang the Table, was open to the public from May 17 – 30, 2022, on the Division website. It allowed anyone interested in this consultation to provide input. A total of two-hundred eight (208) fully or partially completed surveys were submitted online and eight (8) were completed on paper at the Open Houses. All responses, including notes taken during the Open Houses, were combined for analysis.

While most respondents (70%) to the survey described themselves as parents with children, either current or future, attending Wolf Creek Public Schools, about one fifth of respondents (19%) identified themselves as staff and the rest identified as community members (11%).

Respondents represented all schools in Blackfalds and Lacombe, with the majority having children attend at least one of the schools in Blackfalds. The largest number of respondents have children who attend Iron Ridge Elementary Campus.

At the Open Houses, a series of poster boards were set up for participants to view and ask questions at each of the stations. Division staff, along with the Consultant Team, were on hand to answer any questions. There were four (4) stations with information on the consultation process, each alternative option along with boundary maps, and grade configuration rationale. There was also a station set up to provide some preliminary information on the new high school, recently named, Iron Ridge Secondary Campus.

For consistency purposes, respondents who completed the survey online could also view the same poster boards present at the Open Houses. The survey asked a series of questions to identify likes and dislikes about each of the four alternatives presented and each survey question allowed open-ended comments. Participants were also given an opportunity to share further thoughts on each alternative. At the end of the survey, participants were asked to “rank order” each alternative and indicate how they heard about the boundary and grade configuration review.

Four alternatives were presented: two with expanded boundaries and two with the boundaries remaining the same but including grades 10-12 in Blackfalds. The alternatives also explored two different grade configurations: one with two K-5’s, one 6-8 and a 9-12 and the other with two K-3’s, one 4-6 and one 7-12.

## **Wolf Creek Public Schools / BOUNDARY & GRADE CONFIGURATION REVIEW**

**What We Heard: Open House & Online Survey, May 17 – 30, 2022**

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There was very strong support for expanding the boundaries as participants viewed the benefits of distributing enrolment between Blackfalds and Lacombe more equitable, increasing enrolment from the rural area resulting in shorter bus rides and ensuring long-term sustainability of the schools in both communities.

There was also very strong support for configuring the new high school in Blackfalds as a 9-12 with mentions describing this age grouping as most appropriate. Several concerns were highlighted, such as, having junior high students in a high school setting, in particular grade seven students in the same building with grade twelve students. At the same time, there were significant concerns about having two elementary schools in Blackfalds with the same grade configuration, especially two K-5's, and the impacts on the community, school culture, staff collaboration, and resources. Grade configurations presented with primary and upper elementary grades split received support from a number of participants, along with the benefits of smaller age groupings. Enrolment projections generated some questions and concerns regarding the long-term capacity at the Iron Ridge Junior Campus.

Finally, when asked to rank order the alternatives, A-1 was most often cited as the preferred option, followed by B-1, then A-2 with B-2 being the least preferred.

# Wolf Creek Public Schools / BOUNDARY & GRADE CONFIGURATION REVIEW

## What We Heard: Open House & Online Survey, May 17 – 30, 2022

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### I. INTRODUCTION

On December 16, 2021, the Wolf Creek Public Schools Board of Trustees approved the “Guidelines for Consultation on Boundaries and Grade Configurations” for the project, as follows:

- Consultation honours the values and core commitments as outlined in Board Policy 1.
- District schools are faith-based and inclusive environments.
- District resident students have a designated school.
- The District is responsive to the community and offers choice for families.
- Boundary and program decisions made by the Board will:
  - Be informed by the voice of parents, students, staff and the community.
  - Provide for sustainable enrolments across the District.
  - Consider operational costs and the carbon footprint, where possible.
  - Minimize disruption to students and provide choice to families.
  - Consider student safety in all decisions.

The process to obtain public input included an online survey between February 1 – 15, 2022 to understand what the public thought of the current boundaries and grade configurations. The input gathered from that engagement was used by division administration to create four (4) overall options, which included boundary changes in Blackfalds and Lacombe, as well as grade configuration changes in Blackfalds to accommodate the new high school, scheduled to open in September 2024.

#### I.1. Consultation Process, Phases and Timing

The Consultation Process Goals are:

1. **Inform** - To provide the public with information on the project, the consultation process and the opportunities for providing feedback, along with decisions.
2. **Consult** - To obtain public feedback on the boundaries and grade configurations in Blackfalds and Lacombe and communicate how the feedback informed the decision.

The Consultation process for this project has three phases, each with specific activities as outlined below:

Phase 1: September 2021 to March 2022

- Establish an Advisory Committee that represents diverse perspectives to assist in guiding the process.
- Gather feedback on community priorities to inform the design of boundary options and grade configurations.
- Use multiple communication methods to reach out to district families, staff and the broader public.
- Board to receive a report on the feedback gathered in this first phase (completed December 16, 2021).

# Wolf Creek Public Schools / BOUNDARY & GRADE CONFIGURATION REVIEW

## What We Heard: Open House & Online Survey, May 17 – 30, 2022

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Phase 2: March 2022 to June 2022

- Provide the public with boundary and grade configuration options that will accommodate the opening of the new high school in Blackfalds.
- Board to receive summary report on the boundary and grade configuration alternatives presented (scheduled for June 16, 2022).

Phase 3: Begins Fall 2022

- Provide the public with a preferred boundary and grade configuration option(s) that will accommodate the opening of the new high school in Blackfalds.
- Board to receive recommendation on boundary and grade configurations once all public feedback is considered.
- Board to approve boundary and grade configuration changes for Blackfalds and Lacombe.

### **I.2. Open Houses**

Open Houses were held from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on May 17, 2022, in Blackfalds at IRJC and May 18, 2022, in Lacombe at LCHS. The Open Houses were designed as drop-in sessions, with information boards and resource people available to respond to questions and to help capture input and suggestions from participants.

Information stations with display boards were on-site as follows:

- Welcome and Sign In, including orientation to the Open House
- Consultation Process outline, including Phases and Timing.
- Approved Guidelines for Consultation on Boundaries and Grade Configurations.
- Map of the existing boundary for Blackfalds and Lacombe.
- Four alternatives; each alternative is presented with a boundary map and grade configuration rationale.
- Architectural Drawings for the new high school (Iron Ridge Secondary Campus).

A total of thirty-nine (39) individuals (including parents, teachers, and community members) attended the Open Houses. Participants were advised they could either complete a survey provided at the Open House, or submit their responses through the online survey, which provided the same questions. Eight (8) responses were submitted at the Open Houses.

### **I.3. Online Survey**

An online survey, replicating the questions included in the paper survey at the Open Houses, was available to all interested from May 17 - 30, 2022. A total of two-hundred eight (208) fully or partially completed surveys were received, including eight (8) that were submitted at the Open Houses.

Responses from all two-hundred sixteen (216) respondents were combined for analysis, along with notes taken during the Open Houses.

# Wolf Creek Public Schools / BOUNDARY & GRADE CONFIGURATION REVIEW

What We Heard: Open House & Online Survey, May 17 – 30, 2022

## I. ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

Participants in the survey.

**Q1. Do you have children currently attending WCPS schools in Blackfalds or Lacombe?**

Combined Responses					
Question 1	Yes	No	No (By 2024)	Totals	% Responses
Comm Member	8	14	2	24	11.11%
Staff Member	17	22	3	42	19.44%
Parent (Future)	8	5	15	28	12.96%
Parent (Current)	116	3	3	122	56.48%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Schools Represented by Children of Respondents**

**Q2 If you selected "Yes", please indicate which school. (Check all that apply).**

Question 2	EJSM	ELJH	ELEU	ELCH	LO	TRJH	IREC	IRIC	IRJC	Totals
Comm Member	2		2	3	1			1	2	11
Staff Member	4	2	6	4	1	1	2	5	4	29
Parent (Future)	6	8	2	2			4	2	1	25
Parent (Current)	7		11	23	2	4	50	41	30	168
<b>Online Totals</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>233</b>
Paper Totals	0	2	0	1	0	0	4	4	3	14
<b>Combined Totals</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>247</b>
%	7.69%	4.86%	8.50%	13.36%	1.62%	2.02%	24.29%	21.46%	16.19%	100.00%

**Relationship to Wolf Creek Public Schools**

**Q3 Please indicate which best describes your relationship with Wolf Creek Public Schools.**

Question 3	Comm Member
Parent (Current)	122
Parent (Future)	28
Staff	42
Comm Member	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>

### **III. ALTERNATIVES FEEDBACK**

Respondents were asked to provide feedback on four separate alternatives identified as A-1, A-2, B-1, and B-2. Below is a summary of the feedback received on each alternative. Information gathered on questions asked about what they liked, what they didn't like, and further thoughts are captured on each alternative.

#### **III.1. Alternative A-1, Extended Blackfalds Boundary with two K-5, one 6-8, one 9-12 schools**

The feedback received for this alternative highlighted very strong support for a 9-12 high school configuration with more than 50 specific mentions in the comments. Many of the comments in support of a 9-12 reflected the age appropriateness of this configuration.

At the same time, responses received on this alternative showed strong support for the extended boundary. Some of the comments in support of the extended boundary highlighted the impact on busing and allowing for shorter ride times. There were also mentions in support of the expanded boundary making sense to respondents. They indicated this would end up in a more equitable distribution of enrolment between Blackfalds and Lacombe while ensuring sufficient enrolment at the new high school when it opens. Further to this, several comments in support of the expanded boundary identified the importance of ensuring the sustainability of schools while accommodating future growth in the community. There was also a mention of positively impacting class sizes in Lacombe with the redistribution of enrolment. It was mentioned by a number of respondents that using highway 2A as a divider in Blackfalds would contribute to increased safety by minimizing the need to cross the railway tracks to get to school.

However, using highway 2A as a divider generated significant concerns from respondents. Most respondents were not in support of this divider related to having two K-5 schools in the community. Close to 50 specific mentions of "don't like two K-5's" were noted. The commentary centered around concerns about dividing the community, creating more inequities for children, the impact on staff collaboration and the need for additional resources to support two elementary buildings. Some indicated this division would lead to further competition in the community and have social impacts. It was also mentioned that young children would not be walking to school so there would be no added safety benefit in eliminating crossing the tracks.

Concern was also expressed about the capacity at the junior campus and the long-term sustainability. Some respondents highlighted that within a few years the junior campus would not be able to accommodate the growth and require a further reconfiguration. In addition, some concerns were expressed from respondents about the extended boundary and having their children attend school in Blackfalds. A few indicated their support of not expanding the boundary so their children can continue to attend school in Lacombe. Others not in support of the boundary were from the Catholic division who expressed their concerns about accessing schools in Lacombe.



## **Wolf Creek Public Schools / BOUNDARY & GRADE CONFIGURATION REVIEW**

**What We Heard: Open House & Online Survey, May 17 – 30, 2022**

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### **III.2. Alternative A-2, Extended Blackfalds Boundary with two K-3, one 4-6, one 7-12 schools.**

The feedback received on this alternative highlighted very strong support for the expanded boundary with more than 25 specific mentions in the comments. In addition, the comments in support of the expanded boundary highlighted the impact on bus ride times and specific mentions of shorter ride times for those around Blackfalds and in Joffre. Some comments in support of the expanded boundary indicated the boundary would provide sustainability for schools by allowing for growth, providing a more equitable distribution of students between Blackfalds and Lacombe while also allowing the new high school to open at a higher capacity.

There is some support in the feedback for the grade configurations presented in this alternative. A number of the respondents indicated their support for two K-3 schools, with several more indicating their support of a 4-6 grade configuration. The comments highlighted age appropriateness for their support of K-3 and 4-6. A few of the respondents indicated their support for the entire grade configuration presented. For those in support of the 7-12 configuration they indicated the benefits for students being able to access CTS options.

At the same time, there was strong opposition to having junior high age students in a high school setting. Close to 50 respondents indicated they did not like this grade configuration and the strongest opposition was having grade 7 students in a high school setting; there were several specific mentions about grade 7 students. Most of the comments against having junior high students in a high school setting indicated it was not age appropriate, the opportunities for more bullying and social impacts.

Like the feedback received from respondents on alternative A-1, there were several comments and concerns about the impacts of having two elementary schools in Blackfalds. Again, the comments highlighted the impacts on dividing the community, the boundary creating inequities, competition among families, impacts on staff collaboration and concerns about the division having to support two separate buildings with elementary resources.

### **III.3. Alternative B-1, No Extended Blackfalds Boundary with two K-5, one 6-8, one 9-12 schools**

The feedback received on this alternative strongly supports a 9-12 grade configuration for the high school, with many respondents in favor of the groupings, as presented, according to age and maturity levels. There were thirty-four (34) specific mentions in support of the 9-12 grade configuration. While there were some respondents who specifically supported two elementary campuses on each side of the highway, there were others equally not supportive of this option. The supporters of the two elementary campuses saw benefits in keeping students together to walk to/from school and getting on/off the bus. For those opposed to two schools, they offered alternative suggestions for grade configurations using each of the four schools with different grade configurations, such as: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 or recognizing the long-term potential capacity challenge at IRJC, offered K-2, 3-5, 6-7, and 8-12. A few others suggested limiting IRJC to two (2) grades, with grouping as follows: K-3, 4-6, 7-8, and 9-12.

# Wolf Creek Public Schools / BOUNDARY & GRADE CONFIGURATION REVIEW

What We Heard: Open House & Online Survey, May 17 – 30, 2022

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Many respondents recognized the need for boundaries to change and thought it very necessary at this time. There were a number of mentions regarding the Blackfalds boundary being too small. Transportation and close access were cited as drivers for a boundary change, especially if there was room to accommodate additional students. Some respondents were in favor of keeping the boundary the same highlighted the long-term sustainability of Blackfalds schools. There was also concern expressed by some County parents who prefer their children attend school in Lacombe and highlighted busing concerns and their ability to attend their preferred school should boundaries change.

### III.4. Alternative B-2, No Extended Blackfalds Boundary with two K-3, one 4-6, one 7-12 schools

This option received the least amount of support, with the strongest comments presenting a dislike for the grade configuration presented. The grouping of grades 7-9 together with grades 10-12 in one location, all at the high school level received the highest number of mentions. The one positive comment, shared by a few respondents, in favor of the 7-12 high school configuration was the potential for access to CTS courses by junior high students.

In addition, there was a number of comments from respondents expressing concerns about two elementary schools with the same grade configuration. Comments suggested it would create division in the community, detract from staff collaboration, impact resource availability, and dismantle an established culture in the schools. It was noted by some respondents the condition of buildings for both elementary schools are different (older vs. newer) and contribute to the perception of inequality.

Forty-four (44) respondents expressed a strong dislike of this overall option, even when being asked what they “liked” about the alternative.

Similar to the feedback received in alternative B-1, many respondents recognized the need for boundaries to change and thought it very necessary at this time. Transportation ride times and proximity to Blackfalds were recognized as drivers for a Blackfalds boundary change. Others in support of no boundary change were from the Catholic division who expressed their concerns about accessing schools in Lacombe.

## IV. ALTERNATIVES RANK ORDERING RESULTS

Respondents were asked at the end of the survey to rank order their preferred alternatives using a 1-4 ranking. The survey collated all responses to generate an options average rank.

Q16 Please rank order your preferred grade configuration alternative from Alternative A-1, Alternative A-2, Alternative B-1, and Alternative B-2, with the #1 being your most preferred alternative and #4 being your least preferred alternative.

### OPTIONS AVERAGE RANK – based on online responses only

Alternative A-1	1.59
Alternative B-1	2.28
Alternative A-2	2.66
Alternative B-2	3.39

# Wolf Creek Public Schools / BOUNDARY & GRADE CONFIGURATION REVIEW

What We Heard: Open House & Online Survey, May 17 – 30, 2022

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## VII. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT COMMUNICATION EVALUATION

Participants were asked to provide input regarding this public engagement to assist in planning and communicating about future consultation events. The feedback highlighted division direct emails, use of websites and social media generated the largest response.

### VII.4. Please indicate where you heard about the Blackfalds/Lacombe Boundary & Grade Configuration Review Phase 2.

How Heard About this Phase of the Boundary & Grade Configuration Review	
Method	Number of Respondents
Direct E-mail from WCPS	104
Division and/or School Website	76
Social Media	70
Other	15
Community Posters	2
Newspaper Ad/Story	2
Community Newsletter	1