

Education Matters – School Space Alternatives

Beautiful Plains has a problem almost unique in the province among rural school divisions – it's running short of space. It's a lovely problem to have; it means our community is growing and thriving, but it's still a serious problem.

With the expansion of HyLife Foods' pork processing plant in Neepawa, newly arrived workers and their families have increased the number of students in the two local schools from a low in 2008 of 763 to a figure that by the beginning of this year was 904, and is now more like 913 — almost a 20% jump! Added to the problem is the provincial initiative requiring that no class from Kindergarten to grade three may have more than 20 pupils, so just adding desks to existing rooms is not just worse for the children, it's forbidden. But what happens when we run out of classrooms? Schools are only so big.

We do have two well-maintained and well-staffed schools in outlying towns that might be used, but parents in town haven't been keen to move their children to the smaller, more personal distant environment, even though we've offered to run a special bus out if numbers warrant. [That offer, by the way, still stands. If enough parents request a different school "if transport is provided," the bus will run.

We've also juggled the space in our existing schools by putting the grade six classes that used to be in our primary school over to the high school, but still it has been necessary to add portable schoolrooms to both our schools.

The best solution would be to build another school, or expand an existing one. It would serve as a middle school, and take care of grades five to eight.

New school buildings aren't just expensive and complicated; they must be built from an allotment the provincial government makes to capital projects across the entire province. Getting a place on their list takes a lot of effort. The division has done as much of its homework as possible; we've commissioned an authoritative report detailing our needs in terms of space and facilities, and we've engaged architects to draw up plans of what that would look like as an addition to NACI, with perhaps some additional space given over to a child care facility, which is not just badly needed here in Neepawa, but is an initiative of the provincial government.

Our plans have been submitted, and now we wait to see if and when we can start the lengthy building process. In the meantime, though, we have enough space to be going on with, and a wonderful staff to work in it.

Board of Trustees
Beautiful Plains S.D.