



Dixonville School

Viability Report

March 13, 2025

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Division Administrative Staff

**As Per Board Policy 15 -
School and Program Viability**

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Background

During the Peace River School Division (PRSD) January 16, 2025, regular Board Meeting, divisional enrolment projections for the 2025-2026 school year were shared with the Board of Trustees. These enrolment projections are required by Alberta Education by the second week in January because they impact the overall budget allocation to the division through the “Weighted Moving Average” funding model currently being used by government. The main focus of the meeting discussion was on the reduction in enrolment at Dixonville School over the last few years and how a projected enrolment drop to 26 - 31 students for September 2025 will impact operations within the school. With such a sharp expected enrolment decline, many of the criteria required to initiate a school or program viability review as outlined in Section 2 of the Board’s Policy 15 (School and Program Viability) were met. Subsequent to completion of the discussion, the Board passed a motion to direct the Superintendent of Schools to initiate a Viability Review and to provide a Viability Report to the Board before the end of April 2025.

The Board’s Policy 15 provides very clear criteria and processes to guide deliberations about possible school closure or program alteration within a school. Section 3 (Viability Report) of the policy provides details about the review process and the topics to be covered during the review, and this Viability Report is aligned with the format and focus outlined in that section of the policy. Subsequent to sharing this report with the Board and after consideration of its content, if Trustees (by way of motion) decide to accept the report for information and possible use at another time, the process initiated through Policy 15 is then terminated. On the other hand, if the decision (again, by way of motion) is to pursue possible school closure or program alteration through grade reconfiguration, Section 4 (Consideration of Closure/Alteration) of Policy 15 is then initiated. Commencing the process to consider a possible school closure or program alteration will then require written notice to staff and parents about the decision to proceed; the provision of details about meetings with staff, parents, and other community stakeholders; and sharing details about access to Policy 15 and how stakeholders can provide feedback about the possible closure/program alteration. Essentially, this Viability Report represents the culmination of the first formal step in Policy 15, and it ensures that Trustees have the relevant information needed at a public Board Meeting to make an informed decision about possibly proceeding with a formal process to consider closure or alteration of programs at Dixonville School in the wake of enrolment decline and the related dwindling funding to operate the school.

Actioning the Board Motion in Alignment With Policy 15

In adherence to the requirements of Policy 15, subsequent to the January 16, 2025, motion to initiate a viability review, the Superintendent and members of the operational team met with the entire Dixonville staff (Teachers, Educational Assistants, and Office Manager) on January 21, 2025, to share what the viability review process entailed and why it was initiated by the Board. This involved sharing information regarding enrolment projections, how the expected low enrolment will impact the overall budget allocation to the division and school for next year, and

what that will mean for the allocation of staff should the school remain open. After the sharing, an opportunity was provided to ask specific questions and to address other general concerns. Immediately after the staff meeting, there was a similar meeting with the School Council (five parents and three staff) that also included the Board Chair and the local Ward 3 Trustee.

In the weeks after the Staff and School Council Meetings, the Superintendent and many members of the operations team retrieved and compiled the relevant information needed for the completion of this Viability Report. In alignment with Policy 15 requirements and the January 16, 2025, Board motion, the report will be shared with the trustees at the March 13, 2025, regular Board Meeting to help ensure an informed discussion about the future of Dixonville School. As shared with staff and the Parent Council on January 16, 2025, the options available to the Board within the Policy 15 process include accepting the report for information and for later possible use in another school year, or proceeding to consider a possible closure or program alteration as per Section 4 of Policy 15. Accepting the report for information and later possible use means that Dixonville School will continue to offer Grades K-9 programming, albeit with a significantly reduced staff in alignment with the division's staffing model. Considering a possible closure or program alteration (as per Section 4), will have three possible outcomes that include keeping the Grades K-9 school open for a period of time (with significantly reduced staff), altering the program offering within the school (i.e., change to Grades K-3 or Grades K-6 and transporting the Grades 4-9 or Grades 7-9 students to Grimshaw), or closing the school entirely and transporting all Grades K-9 students to Grimshaw along with the Grades 10-12 students who are already being transported there each day.

This Viability Report provides information regarding enrolment patterns at Dixonville School over time and how the projected enrolment for September 2025 will seriously impact divisional funding and staffing for the school. It also provides detailed information about how the division's funding from Alberta Education is generated through the government's Weighted Moving Average (WMA) enrolment Model and the significant financial vulnerability to the division when rural small schools experience significant enrolment decline that qualifies it for less funding under the model. The report also presents information regarding facilities considerations and costs, technology considerations and student transportation considerations. The report concludes with detailed information about the various options available to the Board regarding the future of Dixonville School.

Introduction

Dixonville School is a K-9 school located in Dixonville which is located 41 km from Grimshaw and 44 km from Manning. While the school enrolment at the start of the 2024-2025 school year was 43 students, there are currently 38 students in attendance who are being supported by four teaching staff (3.95 Full Time Equivalent - FTE), four Educational Assistants (2.6 FTE), one support worker/information specialist (0.70 FTE) and an office manager (0.75 FTE). Although some minor maintenance/repair work is required on the building's roof in the near future, the school is otherwise in good condition, having most recently received significant restoration work subsequent to a fire in February 2017 that caused minor damage to the gymnasium storage room and significant smoke damage to the entire school. Historical enrolment numbers from as far back as 1995 (when the last merger of school boards involving the PRSD occurred) indicate that the Grades 10-12 students from the Dixonville area have been transported to Grimshaw to attend high school for at least the last 30 years. Other evidence indicates that the Dixonville high school students have attended school in Grimshaw since at least the early 1980s.

Overall divisional and school-based enrolment is integral to the financial health of the PRSD, and this is especially true for rural small schools like Dixonville School where enrolments can fall below critical thresholds for higher levels of funding within the Weighted Moving Average (WMA) enrolment funding model used by Alberta Education to fund divisions. When this happens, it has a serious negative impact on funding grants to the division because the grants fall far below the operational costs for such schools. As will be shared in more detail in a later section of this report (Historical, Current and Projected Enrolment), since the enrolment peak of 101 students in the 1999-2000 school year (Table 1), Dixonville School's enrolment has fluctuated at less than half this number for most of the last two decades, and has declined in each of the last five years (Tables 2 and 3) and sits at 38 students as of March 6, 2025. Furthermore, the enrolment is expected to drop sharply for the 2025-2026 school year, which will have a significant negative impact on the division's available funding to operate the school. This reality will negatively impact the allocation of staff to the school and therefore impact the nature and quality of services that are able to be provided for our students.

With the limited Alberta Education funding provided to operate a small rural school with less than 35 students, the overall cost to operate Dixonville School in September 2025 (even with a reduction in staff by more than half of the current level as guided by the division's staffing model) will be substantially higher than the grant funding provided to the PRSD. It is this challenging reality that prompted the Board of Trustees to pass the motion at the January 16, 2025, Board Meeting to direct the Superintendent of Schools to complete a viability review and this Viability Report as per Board Policy 15 – School and Program Viability.

Historical, Current, and 2025-26 Projected Enrolment

The historical enrolment for Dixonville School over the past 30 years provides valuable insight into the school's population trends over time. Tables 1 and 2 outline the end-of-September total enrolment figures from 1995 to 2014, capturing two decades of data. Table 3 shows end-of-September enrolment numbers from 2015 to present. The collective 30 years of enrolment data illustrate significant fluctuations and an overall general decline in student numbers over time, reflective of changes in the local population and the impact of the government's school-of-choice initiative, which allows students to attend schools outside their designated catchment area. While criteria exist for this choice option, it has affected - and will continue to impact - small rural schools. Essentially, students living near a larger center can choose to attend a school in that area, and this parental option influences enrolment patterns in rural communities like Dixonville. School-of-choice options and other complex family and community dynamics also make it quite challenging to project enrolment numbers from year to year, which is one reason why the provincially required January projections are sometimes higher or lower than the following September enrolment in some of our schools (see further information about projections in a later section of this report).

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, subsequent to the enrolment peak of 101 students in the 1999-2000 school year, the Dixonville School enrolment dropped sharply over the next decade with just 33 students in attendance at the end of September in the 2009-2010 school year. This represents a 67% decrease in student population in ten years. This reality, combined with the fact that there were just 11 junior high students in September 2011, prompted the Board at that time to pass a motion on October 18, 2011, to consider discontinuing the Grades 7-9 program at Dixonville School. Given that the Board's financial health at that time was strong because of more robust government funding available for school operations and the higher operating reserves held by the PRSD, the main thrust behind that decision for a program review was the concern about the ability to deliver quality junior high school programming for such a small number of students. While the Board ultimately decided in the spring of 2012 to maintain the Grades 7-9 program at the school, enrolment challenges have continued, and they are becoming more profound. The current concerns regarding low enrolment schools are not only about restricted programming options compared to what can be offered in larger schools, but also about the serious financial challenges created because of how government grants are now more tightly tied to enrolment numbers for small rural schools like Dixonville School.

As displayed in Tables 2 and 3, enrolment for the decade from 2010-2011 to 2019-2020 has ranged from a low of 39 students in 2014-2015 to a high of 54 students in 2019-2020 with an average annual population of 46 students over this time period. As outlined in Table 3, enrolment increased from 41 to 54 from 2015 to 2019, representing a 32% increase. However, since the 2019-2020 school year, the student population has steadily declined from 54 students to 43 at the start of the 2024-2025 school year, representing a decline of 20.4%. With a current population of 38 students, the decline is 29.6% since the end-of-September 2019 enrolment count.

Table 1: Dixonville School Ten-year End-of-September Enrolment Data From 1995 – 2004

(Note: The end-of-September enrolment count for 1995, 1996 and 1997 did not have grade-level distributions, but only the **K-3**, **Grades 4-6** and **Grades 7-9** totals)

	Sep-95	Sep-96	Sep-97	Sep-98	Sep-99	Sep-00	Sep-01	Sep-02	03-Sep	Sep-04
ECS	0	0	0	4	6	5	7	7	7	5
1				13	7	11	6	8	5	5
2				8	13	6	10	6	6	6
3		30	37	10	10	13	7	8	6	4
4				11	9	8	10	9	8	7
5				6	13	10	9	7	6	6
6	50	34	28	9	11	12	9	8	5	5
7				8	8	8	11	7	8	7
8				15	8	9	8	12	8	8
9	23	23	32	6	16	7	10	6	10	6
10			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	73	87	97	90	101	89	87	78	69	59

Table 2: Dixonville School Ten-year End-of-September Enrolment Data From 2005 – 2014

	Sep-05	Sep-06	Sep-07	Sep-08	Sep-09	Sep-10	Sep-11	Sep-12	Sep-13	Sep-14
ECS	6	3	2	4	5	7	8	8	4	5
1	4	2	4	2	3	4	3	11	7	5
2	3	3	3	6	2	4	4	5	9	5
3	8	2	3	2	5	4	5	5	7	7
4	2	7	4	3	2	6	3	4	3	5
5	5	4	8	4	3	4	6	3	4	4
6	3	4	2	8	4	2	4	4	2	4
7	3	3	3	2	6	3	2	4	4	1
8	6	4	4	8	1	6	2	0	3	2
9	6	7	2	1	2	2	7	3	0	1
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	46	39	35	40	33	42	44	47	43	39

Table 3: Dixonville School Ten-year End-of-Sept. Enrolment Data From 2015 - 2024/2025

	Sep-15	Sep-16	Sep-17	Sep-18	Sep-19	Sep-20	Sep-21	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24
ECS	9	8	10	4	4	2	6	6	3	4
1	2	8	8	9	5	5	2	5	4	3
2	5	2	4	7	11	4	6	0	4	2
3	6	5	3	5	8	10	2	6	0	5
4	6	5	4	3	5	8	11	4	5	1
5	5	6	4	5	4	9	8	10	3	7
6	2	5	8	4	4	3	5	9	9	4
7	3	2	6	7	4	2	3	5	8	10
8	2	4	2	5	5	4	1	0	5	6
9	1	2	2	1	4	5	5	1	0	1
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	41	47	51	50	54	52	49	46	41	43

Comparing the end-of-September 2020 actual enrolment (52 students) to the projected enrolment for September 2025 (26 to 31 students), the percentage decline is 40% - 50% in just six years. Table 4 reveals the distribution of students across grade levels for the upcoming school year for both 26 students (lowest projection) and 31 students (highest projection – the number reported to Alberta Education for grant calculation for next year). It is important to note that for both projections, no kindergarten children are expected to attend school in Dixonville next year. This represents a significant concern about the overall enrolment moving forward (see Table 5), and the related serious impact on the government funding provided to the division to operate the school.

Table 4: Dixonville School Projected Enrolment Distribution in 2025-2026

	ECS	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Total
2025-26 low est.	0	1	3	2	5	0	4	2	7	2	26
2025-26 high est.	0	2	4	2	5	1	5	3	7	2	31 (the # reported to AB Ed)

A more detailed analysis of enrolment data over the last five years (see Table 3) reveals a concerning pattern regarding the future enrolment at Dixonville School. The two largest classes in September 2024 were Grade 5 (seven students) and Grade 7 (ten students), representing 39.5% of the entire school population. All other grades had one to six students with an average of 3.3

students per grade for these eight classes. With no students projected for kindergarten next year, once the large Grade 7 class (now down from ten to seven students as of March 6, 2025) finishes Grade 9 in the 2026-2027 school year, the enrolment for Dixonville School will become even more challenging from both programming and financial perspectives.

Table 5 shows projected enrolments for the next five years based on 31 projected students (the highest projection) for September 2025. The average number of students per grade from Grades 1 to 6 is two, so the projections for 2026-2027 and onward assumes two students for kindergarten each year, and the projections also assume that no students leave, and no new students arrive at the school during this period. While neither of these assumptions may play out, the exercise is revealing and concerning, nonetheless. Essentially, an ongoing average enrolment of less than 35 students has serious negative financial consequences for the PRSD in operating Dixonville School. There are also serious challenges with any of our rural small schools whose average populations fall below enrolment thresholds for higher levels of funding (see Table 8 for the thresholds).

Table 5: Dixonville School Projected Enrolment Distribution From 2025-2030

	ECS	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Total
2025-26	0	2	4	2	5	1	5	3	7	2	31
2026-27	2	0	2	4	2	5	1	5	3	7	31
2027-28	2	2	0	2	4	2	5	1	5	3	26
2028-29	2	2	2	0	2	4	2	5	1	5	25
2029-30	2	2	2	2	0	2	4	2	5	1	22

Even if the number of kindergarten students at Dixonville School were to be an average of three per year (50% more than the two per year estimated in Table 5), and assuming no other students entering or leaving the school over a ten year period from K to Grade 9, the ongoing total school enrolment would be 30 students, well below the 35 student average attendance required for the division to maintain the funding level that has been received for the school since 2020. Also noteworthy here is that the funding received for Dixonville School in each of the last five years has not covered the annual cost to operate the school (see more specific details in the Funding/Financial and Staffing Costs sections of this report).

Challenges Regarding Enrolment Projections

Projecting student enrolments in January for the start of the following school year is a challenging exercise that is required by Alberta Education to ensure department staff have enrolment numbers on which to build the provincial budget that is typically completed towards the end of February and shared with school divisions in March. Table 6 highlights some details regarding January

projections (P - projected in January for the next school year) compared to the June actual enrolment (J - June actual count) and the following September enrolment (A - actual count at the end of September of the new school year). The data reveal that for five of the last ten years, the actual end-of-September enrolment (A) was slightly higher than the previous January's projection (P) by a range of 1 to 4 students. Furthermore, for four of the last five years, the actual end-of-September enrolment (A) for Dixonville School was lower than the January projected enrolment (P) by a range of -3 to -14 students. These data illustrate the variation that can exist between January projections and September actual enrolment for a school.

Although the Dixonville School January projected enrolment for September 2025 is 26 to 31 students, there is no way of knowing for sure how closely this will match the actual count in September. That said, the pattern for Dixonville School since 2015 indicates that January over-projections are often larger (3-14 students) than under-projections (1-4 students), meaning that the September enrolment is more likely to be less than projected in January of the same calendar year. Using 31 students as the number reported to Alberta Education in January, the minimum WMA enrolment will not meet the important minimum enrolment threshold of 35 to qualify the school for a much higher level of rural small schools funding it has qualified for since this funding model came into effect in 2020. As will be shared in a later section (see the Funding/Financial Considerations section), even with qualifying for Group 2 funding (see Table 8) for each of the last five years, that funding amount has not covered the annual cost of operating the school. Thus, the school has operated in a deficit position each year since 2020.

Table 6: Grades K-9 Comparison of Projected and Actual Enrolments From 2015 - 2024

(Note: J – highlights the June actual enrolment count; P – represents the January enrolment projection for the next school year; A – represents the actual end-of-September enrolment count)

Dixonville Historical, Current and Projected Enrollment

	ECS			Gr 1			Gr 2			Gr 3			Gr 4			Gr 5			Gr 6			ELEM. TOTAL		
Dxvl	J	P	A	J	P	A	J	P	A	J	P	A	J	P	A	J	P	A	J	P	A	J	P	A
2015/16	5	7	9	6	2	2	4	5	5	7	4	6	5	6	6	4	5	5	5	3	2	36	32	35
2016/17	10	8	8	2	8	8	6	2	2	5	5	5	7	5	5	4	6	6	3	4	5	37	38	39
2017/18	8	8	10	8	6	8	3	8	4	5	2	3	4	5	4	6	5	4	5	6	8	39	40	41
2018/19	11	7	4	8	9	9	7	9	7	3	6	5	6	3	3	4	4	5	8	4	4	47	42	37
2019/20	5	4	4	9	4	5	7	9	11	5	7	8	2	5	5	5	2	4	4	5	4	37	36	41
2020/21	2	4	2	4	4	5	4	4	4	10	11	10	7	9	8	8	4	9	3	6	3	38	42	41
*2021/22	6		6	1		2	5		6	3		2	11		11	7		8	3		5	36	0	40
2022/23	6	4	6	5	5	5	1	1	0	7	5	6	3	3	4	10	11	10	7	7	9	39	36	40
2023/24	4	2	3	4	7	4	5	5	4	0	2	0	6	7	5	4	4	3	9	12	9	32	39	28
2024/25	4	3	4	4	4	3	5	4	2	0	5	5	6	0	1	4	6	7	9	4	4	32	26	26
Jan 2025			4			4			2			5			1			7			3			26

	Gr 7			Gr 8			Gr 9			JUNIOR HIGH TOTAL			TOTAL			Act vs Proj	Sept vs June
	J	P	A	J	P	A	J	P	A	J	P	A	J	P	A		
2015/16	1	4	3	2	1	2	1	1	1	4	6	6	40	38	41	3	1
2016/17	4	2	2	2	3	4	1	2	2	7	7	8	44	45	47	2	3
2017/18	2	5	6	4	2	2	2	3	2	8	10	10	47	50	51	1	4
2018/19	6	8	7	2	5	5	3	2	1	11	15	13	58	57	50	-7	-8
2019/20	7	4	4	5	5	5	1	5	4	13	14	13	50	50	54	4	4
2020/21	2	3	2	5	5	4	4	5	5	11	13	11	49	55	52	-3	3
*2021/22	3		3	1		1	4		5	8	0	9	44	59	49	-10	5
2022/23	6	3	5	0	3	0	2	1	1	8	7	6	47	43	46	3	-1
2023/24	9	9	8	4	7	5	0	0	0	13	16	13	45	55	41	-14	-4
2024/25	9	9	10	4	9	6	0	5	1	13	23	17	45	49	43	-6	-2
Jan 2025			8			4			1			13			39		

- J** = The number of students in school in June at the end of the previous school year
- P** = Projected Enrollment in January for the following school year
Projected numbers have to be submitted to AB. Ed. (as per regulations) in January to perform budgetary decisions
- A** = Actual Enrollment is the number of actual students in school at the end of Sept of that school year
- = Actual # of students in school in January 2025
*2021/22 projected numbers were not broken down into grades.
There was just a final number on the report.

School-of-Choice Impact on Projections

Challenges inherent in projecting student enrolment in January for the following September include a range of generally more complex family and community dynamics that are at play throughout the division and across the province. Projections are further impacted by the school-of-choice provision for parents and their children, especially for small rural schools that are relatively close to larger schools in other nearby communities as is the case for Dixonville catchment students. In this regard, the division's current student enrolment information for the Dixonville School catchment area is illuminating.

As displayed in Table 7, there are currently 87 students who live in the Dixonville School catchment area that attend our schools and/or ride our buses. Fifteen of these are Grades 10-12 students, 11 of whom receive their high school programming in Grimshaw as per the decades-old practice. Of the remaining 72 ECS to Grade 9 students who are eligible to attend Dixonville School, only 38 (53%) currently do so as per the displayed distribution pattern across grade levels. The other 34 students (47%) attend a school-of-choice in Grades 1-9, with 16 choosing Grimshaw Public School. The dynamics regarding student movement within the division is such that in any given year, families in the Dixonville School catchment area may decide to either move their

children to Grimshaw (or another school-of-choice) or to return to Dixonville School. That said, the trend for many years has been towards moving students to a school-of-choice (predominantly GPS) and keeping them there until they complete their schooling.

Table 7: Current Enrolment Status for Dixonville Catchment Students (March 6, 2025)

	ECS	G. 1	G. 2	G. 3	G. 4	G. 5	G. 6	G. 7	G. 8	G. 9	Sub- total	10- 12	Total
Students @ DXS	4	4	2	4	1	7	4	7	4	1	38 (53%)	0	38
Students @ GPS & Other Schools	0	3	4	3	2	2	2	5	7	6	34 (47%)	15	49
Total Students	4	7	6	7	3	9	6	12	11	7	72	15	87

Funding/Financial Considerations

Dixonville School is a rural small school according to the definition provided in the Alberta Education funding manual. Schools that qualify are funded by the Rural Small School Grant, which is designed to address challenges associated with operating small schools in rural Alberta. Through this approach, divisions are provided with a block of funding that is intended to be more predictable and sustainable over time, but it is predominantly tied to enrolment and is therefore very vulnerable to declining enrolments and it falls well short of covering operational costs. From 2020 to 2025, a three-year Weighted Moving Average (WMA) enrolment calculation was used to determine the applicable funding level within the model (See more details below regarding the WMA enrolment funding model). This calculation will change to a two-year WMA enrolment model for September 2025 as per the recent Alberta Education budget announcement focused on helping school divisions with student enrolment growth. With this adjusted model, the declining enrolment trends in Dixonville School will have a more detrimental impact on the block funding received by the PRSD to operate the school.

Table 8 displays the block funding rate that has been used by Alberta Education for the last five years (since 2020) for rural small schools based on student population as calculated by the three-year WMA enrolment model. With a projected enrolment of 26 students for 2025-2026, Dixonville School's two-year WMA enrolment will only qualify it for Group 1 funding, the very lowest level of funding in the WMA Rural Small Schools Block Funding model. In fact, even with an enrolment of 31 students for September that the division submitted to Alberta Education in January, the two-year WMA enrolment will not meet the minimum average attendance requirement of 35 students to qualify the school for the higher Group 2 funding amount of \$487,369. A later section of this report (see Table 11) provides specific details regarding the block funding available to the PRSD to operate the school next year with 31 students, and if the actual enrolment in September is less than 31, the divisional budget received later this month or early April will be reduced accordingly next year.

Table 8: Block Funding Rate per School (applicable group level rate)

Group	Number of Students (WMA Enrolment Threshold)	Block Funding Rate
Group 1	<35 and Hutterite Colony Schools	\$26,792.50+Base Instruction Grant
Group 2	=>35<55	\$487,369.47
Group 3	=>55<75	\$671,073.49
Group 4	=>75<95	\$811,472.45
Group 5	=>95<115	\$930,843.88
Group 6	=>115<135	\$1,017,434.00
Group 7	=>135<150	\$1,082,376.60

Weighted Moving Average (WMA) Funding Model

Base instruction grants for the PRSD, including the Rural Small School Grant, have been allocated using the three-year Weighted Moving Average (WMA) enrolment of school authorities since 2020. Funding provided through the base instruction component does not allocate funding for specific students or schools. Rather, WMA Full Time Equivalent (FTE) enrolment is used to allocate funding for the Early Childhood Services (ECS) to Grade 12 instructional activities of the entire school jurisdiction. In the case of the Rural Small School Grant, the WMA FTE enrolment is calculated for each qualifying small school. Since the inception of the three-year WMA funding model in 2020, Dixonville School has qualified for **Group 2 funding** (see Table 8 above), but the school does not qualify next year because the enrolment decline has moved the WMA enrolment below 35 students (see details in the next section of this report). This will have a serious negative impact on funding available to the PRSD to operate the school.

The three-year WMA enrolment calculation used for the 2024-2025 school year is highlighted in Table 9 below. Determination of eligibility for a funding group within the model for the current school year (2024-2025) used a 20% weighting factor for the actual school enrolment in 2022-2023, a 30% weighting for the estimated enrolment for 2023-2024 and a 50% weighted factor for January 2024 projected enrolment for the 2024-2025 school year. Enrolment over-projections and over-estimates result in adjustments to the funding allocation to the division during the next budget year, so it is important that these projections are as accurate as possible to avoid following year funding reductions (claw backs that further impact the division's ability to operate its schools).

Table 9: 2020-2025 Three-year Weighted Moving Average Calculation

School Year	Weighted Factor	Enrolment Count
2022-2023	20%	Actual
2023-2024	30%	Estimate
2024-2025	50%	Projected

The 2025 Budget announcement by the Government of Alberta on February 27, 2025, indicated a change in the enrolment calculations for the WMA enrolment funding model. While the model and the related groups or tiers of funding are not changing, a new two-year WMA enrolment calculation is replacing the former three-year WMA calculation. Table 10 displays this new WMA model for the 2025-2026 school year which includes a 30% weighted factor for the actual enrolment in the 2024-2025 school year and a 70% weighted factor for the January projected enrolment for the 2025-2026 school year.

Table 10: New 2025-2026 Two-year Weighted Moving Average Calculation

School Year	Weighted Factor	Enrolment Count
2024-2025	30%	Actual
2025-2026	70%	Projected

This new two-year WMA enrolment funding model is beneficial for school divisions experiencing student population growths, but not for the PRSD which has had a relatively stagnant and sometimes slightly declining overall population over the last few years. Consequently, there is little in the 2025 budget announcement that alleviates the financial pressures being felt by the PRSD in operating its rural small schools that are into declining enrolment patterns.

Using this new two-year WMA funding model, Table 11 shows the funding calculation for Dixonville School for next year based on last September's enrolment of 42 students according to Alberta Education records and a projected enrolment of 31 students for next September. Note that Alberta Education's official student count for Dixonville School for September 2024 was 42 students (versus PRSD's 43) because it counts each kindergarten student as 0.5 for the purposes of funding calculations. With a WMA enrolment of less than 35 students (34.3 using the new two-year WMA), the block funding generated for Dixonville School next year is projected to be \$230,262 versus the \$487,369 for the Group 2 Rural Small School grant (see Table 8) that the school qualified for this year. This is a shortfall of \$257,107 representing a reduction of 52.8% in available operational revenue for the school. As such, the deficit between revenue and costs to operate the school will be even larger than in the current year. Against this reality, continuing to operate the school next year will require a redirection of PRSD funding from other sources that were intended for other purposes.

Table 11: Projected Enrolment and Funding for the 2025-2026 school year

School Year	Weighted Factor	Enrolment Count	2025-2026 amounts
2024-2025	30%	42 (note: this is the official AB. Ed. enrolment for Sept. 2024, and the PRSD number was 43)	12.6
2025-2026	70%	31 Projected	21.7
Estimated enrolment for 2025-2026			34.3
Rural Small School Grant		<35 Average	26,793
Base Funding		31 X \$6,563.53	203,469
Total Base Funding			230,262

Staffing Considerations

The PRSD uses a very detailed staffing model to equitably allocate teachers to schools based on projected enrolment for the upcoming school year and individualized and specialized student needs. It also uses a detailed process for allocation of Educational Assistants to schools based on student needs. As earlier noted, enrolment projections are completed in January to meet Alberta Education timelines for budget completion in February, and lower student projections result in less operational funding for the division and schools. Schools that experience a significant enrolment decline from one year to the next will receive a reduced staffing allocation for the following September. For low population schools, a shift in population by five to ten students from one year to the next, will generally have a significant impact on staffing allocations.

With an enrolment decline from 38 students currently to a projected 26 to 31 students for next September (a decrease of 18% - 33%), the division's staffing model suggests that Dixonville School will likely be allocated two teaching units and one Educational Assistant, plus part-time office manager support for the 2025-2026 school year. This reduction in staff because of expected enrolment decline will result in a substantial shift in the way educational services will be delivered at the school next year. Table 12 shows the expected distribution of students across grade levels for 26 students as well as for 31 students if five students believed to be leaving the school before September actually stay. For either reality, if the school remains open next year, it will operate predominantly with two groups of students. Based on 26 students, there will likely be a Grades 1-4 group of 11 students and a Grades 6-9 group of 15 students. If the actual enrolment is 31 students, there will likely be a Grades 1-5 group of 14 students, and Grades 6-9 group of 17 students for much of the day. Regardless, if Dixonville School remains open next year, it will likely operate with more intense multigrade program delivery than in previous years.

Table 12: Dixonville School Projected Enrolment Distribution in 2025-2026

	ECS	G. 1	G. 2	G. 3	G. 4	G. 5	Sub- total	G. 6	G. 7	G. 8	G. 9	Sub- total	Total
2025-26 (low)	0	1	3	2	5	0	11	4	2	7	2	15	26
2025-26 (high)	0	2	4	2	5	1	14	5	3	7	2	17	31 (The number reported to AB Education in January)

Staffing Costs

Although the enrolment at Dixonville School has been into an overall decline since the 1999 enrolment peak of 101 students (See Tables 1-3), there was a slight upward trend from 2015-2019 followed by enrolment decline in each of the last five years. Despite this decline from 52 students in 2020 to 43 in 2024, the staffing levels at the school have remained relatively stable. As indicated in Table 13, even though the school's three-year WMA enrolment from 2020 to 2025 qualified the school for Group 2 funding of the Rural Small Schools grant revenue, this funding did not cover the basic cost of staffing for the school in each of these years. It is important to note that the staffing costs in Table 13 include salaries and other employment-related costs to the PRSD such as Canada Pension premiums, Employment Insurance premiums, and costs for Health Care benefits.

The figures in Table 13 do not include the cost of leave replacements in the school such as sick leave, family medical care, personal days, and maternity leave. The additional cost of providing substitute staff during the year to cover these leaves is generally an additional 20% of the staffing costs. The staffing costs also do not include the cost of support from Central Operations, including administrative support for the Principal, Divisional I-Coach support, Divisional Literacy and Numeracy support, Divisional Indigenous Education support, Divisional Mental Health support, Peace Collaborative Services supports (e.g., speech, occupational therapy, psychology), or Division Student Information and Divisional Financial support. Neither do the numbers in the table reflect costs for technology services, custodial costs or facilities support costs. Essentially, the real staffing costs for Dixonville School are significantly higher than the numbers displayed in the table, so the actual yearly deficits are therefore much higher as well.

The drop in enrolment at Dixonville School since 2020 (see Table 3) combined with the projected enrolment drop to 26-31 students for September 2025 (see Table 4), has pushed the school's 2025-2026 two-year WMA enrolment below the minimum 35 threshold to qualify for the Rural Small Schools Group 2 grant. Table 13 provides a breakdown of staffing costs (including employee benefits costs) compared to Group 2 grant revenue generated through the three-year WMA enrolment calculations over the last five years, and data reveal deficits each year.

Table 13: Impact of WMA Enrolment on Revenue Versus Staffing Costs

	WMA Enrolment Actual	Teachers FTE	Support Staff FTE	EA	Staffing Cost	RSS Grant Revenue	(Deficit)
2020-2021	50.50	3.50	1.20	0.90	491,048	450,000	(41,048)
2021-2022	48.50	3.85	1.20	1.70	476,010	450,000	(26,010)
2022-2023	45.50	3.85	1.20	1.00	487,995	454,500	(33,495)
2023-2024	41.85	3.95	0.95	1.50	529,586	481,770	(47,816)
2024-2025	41.45	3.95	0.90	3.30	575,350	487,369	(87,981)
2025-2026	34.30	2.00	0.95	1.00	355,998	230,262	(125,736)

Also shown in Table 13, with a two-year WMA enrolment of 34.30 for the 2025-2026 school year using a projected enrolment of 31 students for September, the grant to the PRSD for Dixonville School drops substantially from \$487,369 to \$230,262. The table also shows that even with staff being greatly reduced from eight personnel (8.2 Full Time Equivalent - FTE) to four (3.9 FTE, including two teachers, one EA and 0.95 FTE for other support) and overall staffing costs (salary and benefits costs) being reduced to \$355,998, there is still a projected \$125,736 shortfall for the school. As referenced earlier, this shortfall does not include many other staffing costs such as coverage for leave requests and human resources costs to provide multiple layers of support services to the school. It also does not account for the fact that if there are 31 students, we may have to hire an additional 0.3 FTE teacher for the school.

Exploring school operational costs further, Table 14 displays the annual deficit incurred with staffing costs (salaries and employee benefits) and the school budget allocation combined. Although this is not the complete picture regarding ongoing financial challenges at Dixonville School, it demonstrates that the division's management staff has been required to redirect funding from other sources to maintain educational service delivery at the school for several years now.

Table 14: Impact of WMA Enrolment on Revenue Versus Staffing & School Budget Costs

	WMA Enrolment Actual	Teachers FTE	Support Staff FTE	EA	Staffing Cost	School Budget	RSS Grant Revenue	(Deficit)
2020-2021	50.50	3.50	1.20	0.90	491,048	25,650	450,000	(66,698)
2021-2022	48.50	3.85	1.20	1.70	476,010	26,400	450,000	(52,410)
2022-2023	45.50	3.85	1.20	1.00	487,995	22,125	454,500	(55,620)
2023-2024	41.85	3.95	0.95	1.50	529,586	19,913	481,770	(67,729)
2024-2025	41.45	3.95	0.90	3.30	575,350	19,913	487,369	(107,894)
2025-2026	34.30	2.00	0.95	1.00	355,998	15,000	230,262	(140,736)

Facility Considerations

Background

With an enrolment of 43 students at the beginning of the school year, Dixonville School is currently operating at only 38% of its total capacity. This low utilization rate negatively impacts the budget allocation to the division for the school for facilities and maintenance operational costs. The significant steady decline in enrolment over time has been influenced by several factors, including demographic changes, shifts in the local economy, and increased competition from nearby schools. Despite a shortfall in revenue for facilities and maintenance services for the school, there have been significant investments into improving the facility over the years. Table 15 provides a general summary of most of these investments over time.

Table 15: Summary of Building Upgrade and Repair Costs From 1999 - 2024

Year	Expenditure	Details
1999-2005	\$3.3 million	General office area modernization, significant interior and exterior modernization work (including removal of 1955 and 1957 sections of the building), construction of new main entrance and adjacent music room, new gym storage, classroom extensions, replacement of mechanical systems and electrical system upgrades. \$3.17 million of this amount was spent on the 2001 modernization project.
2006-2010	\$108,000	Hot water tank repairs, library renovations, sidewalk repairs, wheelchair accessibility, heating and electrical upgrades
2011-2015	\$205,500	Classroom upgrades, VOIP telephone system, roof replacement on a section of the original building, and school library upgrades
2016-2020	\$3.63 million	Foods lab upgrade, heating system upgrade, security system, playground installations, water main valves/water heater repairs, building repair and refurbishing from 2017 gymnasium storage room fire (\$3.53 million)
2021-2024	\$26,000	Server room air conditioning, repairs to building exterior, security lockdown hardware, bathroom renovations, upgrade of security and fire panel.

While not capturing all the work done on Dixonville School over the last 25 years, the above list represents nearly \$7.3 million in expenditures and this investment has helped keep the school in good operating condition over time. Currently the only significant work to be completed on the building is a small section the gym roof which is showing signs of failure. The cost of this work is estimated to be approximately \$35,000 and its completion is currently being planned for this spring/summer season.

Annual Facility Operational Costs

Annual Operations and Maintenance funding is calculated as student and space allocations. The student allocation is based on the WMA enrolment multiplied by the per-student grant. The space allocation is based on the utilized and under-utilized space in the school as determined by the Alberta Education - Capital Planning Department.

Dixonville School has a current utilization rate of 38%. Thus, the space allocation is calculated as follows:

- Utilized area in square meters x Utilized Rate
- Under-utilized area x Under-utilized Rate

As such, a low space utilization of 38% results in significantly less grant funding for Operations and Maintenance expenditures. Table 16 shows a comparison between the operations and maintenance revenue over the last five years and the annual expenses each year. In each year from 2020-2021 to 2023-2024, the division experienced deficits in this area of overall operations. Estimates to August 2025 indicate a deficit again this year of \$22,005, and the estimate for the 2025-2026 school year suggests an even larger deficit because of increasing costs to operate the school versus reduced revenues because of enrolment decline and a lower space utilization rate.

Table 16: Annual Operating Costs Per Student Allocation

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	Estimated to August 31, 2025	Estimate 2025-2026
O&M Revenue	102,120	97,798	98,131	102,321	101,613	98,806
Expenses						
Power	18,819	19,191	20,578	26,114	27,420	28,791
Gas	11,144	16,012	18,433	13,245	14,305	15,020
Water/Sewer	2,504	3,405	2,296	2,241	2,420	2,541
Building Maintenance	32,553	19,645	24,056	27,521	29,723	31,209
Insurance	10,146	10,711	10,804	12,174	13,148	13,806
Caretaking	37,885	38,297	37,667	36,972	36,602	38,432
Total	113,051	107,261	113,834	118,267	123,618	129,799
Annual Deficit	(10,931)	(9,463)	(15,703)	(15,946)	(22,005)	(30,993)

Additional Considerations

The costs listed in Table 16 above only include those annual costs that apply directly to the Dixonville School physical structure and related property. This list does not include many of the other costs relating to the completion of specific projects and the general provision of services to operate Dixonville School such as the following:

- Staffing costs for management and supervision;
- Costs for project administrative duties;
- Costs relating to safety provisions;
- Training costs for maintenance staff;
- Divisional vehicle costs for staff visits to the school to complete work; and
- Costs of additional work requests to the facilities department.

Considerations Regarding Caretaker Contracts

The caretaker contracts are adjusted each year for the enrolment in each of our schools. As the enrolment decreases, so does the value of the contract in the school, hence making the caretaker contract less profitable. This is one reason why it is difficult to keep qualified caretakers in the small rural schools. With its declining enrolment, the provision of caretaker contracts at Dixonville School will pose challenges similar to other schools.

Technology Considerations

The PRSD provides robust technology services to all staff and students across the jurisdiction. The Technology Services Department operates as a centralized function and most technology costs will remain unchanged regardless of whether a school is closed, or its programs are altered because these technology services will still be provided for the students and staff regardless of the schools they attend. For example, PRSD software costs are based on the number of students and staff regardless of the school they are attending. The one-to-one student devices are also deployed based on the number of students versus the number of schools. Shared and centralized infrastructure and overall technical support remains relatively unchanged after any school closure or grade/program alterations. As well, Supernet costs are funded directly by Alberta Education and will not be a factor for consideration in a process to consider school closure or alternation. Areas of expenditure that would be impacted by a decision to close Dixonville School include the annual printing costs (printers and related costs) of \$3200 and annual costs for onsite hardware of approximately \$7,200. These two costs would represent annual savings, as would the reduction in costs associated with visits to the school each year to support routine and more emergent technology needs.

Transportation Considerations

Distribution of Dixonville Catchment Area Students Within the Region

Divisional transportation data indicate that there are 87 students who live in the Dixonville School catchment area that either attend our schools and/or ride our buses to other schools. Fifteen of these students are enrolled in Grades 10-12 programming. Of the remaining 72 students in the Dixonville School catchment, 38 (53%) currently attend Dixonville School and 34 (47%) attend a school-of-choice in Grades 1-9 with a distribution across schools and grade levels as outlined in Table 17. Of the 15 Grades 10-12 students and the 34 Grades 1-9 students who receive their education outside Dixonville, most attend GPS as per a decades-long practice. Eleven of the 15 Grades 10-12 students (73%) and 16 of the 34 Grades 1-9 students (47%) attend GPS.

Table 17: Distribution of Grades 1-12 Dixonville Catchment Students in Other Schools

	ECS	G. 1	G. 2	G. 3	G. 4	G. 5	G. 6	G. 7	G. 8	G. 9	Sub- total	G. 10-12	Sub- total	Total
Students @ GPS	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	3	5	5	16	11	11	27
Student @ LGS	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	7	1	1	8
Students @ TAN	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Students @ HFS	0	1	1	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	7	0	0	7
Students @ GMS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
Students @ PHLC	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	2
Students @ PRHS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Students @ PH	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Students @ PRO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Total	0	2	3	0	2	0	2	3	7	5	34	15	15	49

Bussing Routes

There are currently two bussing systems operating within the Dixonville catchment area. One system (Dixonville School System - bus routes 17 and 65) is focused on transporting Grades K-9 students to Dixonville School. The other system (Grimshaw School System - routes 77 and 78) take Grades 10-12 students and school-of-choice Grades 1-9 students to Grimshaw Public School. Currently, of the 38 students attending Dixonville School, 12 walk to school, 14 take route 17 to school and 12 students take route 65 to school. Table 18 displays the cost to operate bus routes 17 and 65 to transport the 26 Grades K-9 bus riders to and from Dixonville School. This information indicates that these routes will operate at a deficit of \$16775 in the current year.

Table 18: Revenue Versus Cost to Operate Two Bus Routes to Dixonville School

Dixonville School Bus Routes 17 and 65	
Current Revenue from Transportation Grant (2024-2025 School year) for students attending Dixonville school	<u>\$110,801</u>
Payroll costs only for 2 existing bus routes (182 school days)	\$46,986
Operational cost for 2 school buses @ \$1.64 per km	
Route 17 - 176 kms per day (182 school days)	52,532
Route 65 - 94 kms per day (182 school days)	<u>28,057</u>
Total costs per year	<u>\$127,576</u>
Net Transportation Costs using existing costs and revenue	<u>\$ (16,774.60)</u>

Students in the Dixonville catchment area live in a widely distributed geographical region, which is why there are two bus systems in place in the region – the Dixonville School two-route system that transports Grades K-9 students to and from Dixonville School, and the Grimshaw two-route system that transports Grades 10-12 students (along with Grades 1-9 school-of-choice students) to Grimshaw. Table 19 displays the current bus route pick-up and drop-off times for each bus route for transportation to Dixonville School and to Grimshaw Public School.

Table 19: The current bus route pick-up and drop-off times:

	Dixonville School		GPS/Holy Family	
	Route 17	Route 65	Route 77	Route 78
First-morning pick-up	7:31	7:50	7:30	7:09
Drop-off at school	8:36	8:32	8:41	8:36
Duration of AM trip	65 minutes	42 minutes	71 minutes	87 minutes
Pick-up from school	3:35	3:35	3:35	3:35
Last drop-off at home	4:39	4:21	4:33	5:17
Duration of PM trip	64 minutes	46 minutes	58 minutes	102 minutes

If Dixonville School is closed, three buses would be required to transport students to GPS to ensure reasonable trip durations for the entire Dixonville catchment area. As outlined in Table 20, the three-route system would involve adjusting the existing Route 77 and creating two new

routes (New Route 1 and New Route 2). With this three-route system, parents will still have school-of-choice options as per the PRSD's AP 562 – Transportation Service Areas (School of Choice) and in alignment with Government student transportation regulations.

Table 20: Morning Starting Pick-up Times for a Three-bus System for Transporting all Grades K-12 Students to Grimshaw

	New	New	Adjusted
	Route 1	Route 2	Route 77
First morning pick-up	7:32	7:25	7:21
Drop-off at school	8:36	8:36	8:41
Duration of AM trip	65 minutes	71 minutes	80 minutes
Pick-up from school	3:35	3:35	3:35
Last drop-off at home	4:39	4:46	4:55
Duration of PM trip	64 minutes	71 minutes	80 minutes

Other Financial Considerations

When schools are closed, School Boards then engage in a process to sell the property, and this process is guided by the new Bill 13 – The Real Property Governance Act. If the Board is not able to sell the property or otherwise legally transfer it to new owners, the division would then continue to incur some costs associated with continued ownership (e.g., property taxes, electrical services, insurance, general maintenance). Given that there is currently no program available for School Boards to secure funding to demolish a closed school that is not needed within the municipality, such demolition costs would need to be covered by the Board.

Options For Consideration by the Board as Per Policy 15

In consideration of the contents of this Viability Report that was developed in alignment with the Board Policy 15 requirements, below are the various options for the Board's consideration. By way of motion, the Board could decide to accept the report for information purposes and for later possible use, or it could decide to move to consider possible school closure or program alteration as per Section 4 of the policy. A motion to consider school closure or program alteration will precipitate a broad-based stakeholder consultation process that involves sharing important information with stakeholders about the school and establishing processes for stakeholder feedback in advance of the Board's final decision regarding the future of the school. Under normal circumstances, the Board would make a final decision by April 30 as per Section 2.2.2 of Policy 15.

As per Section 3.3 and Section 4.6 of Policy 15, the following options are available for consideration.

Option 1: Keep the School Open in September 2025 as a K-9 school with a significant staff reduction

This option can materialize in two ways. Firstly, upon receipt of the Viability Report and after a detailed discussion, the Board could vote (as per Policy 15 - Section 3.3) to accept the report for information and for later use if the viability of Dixonville School is reviewed again later. A second pathway to getting to this option would be after the initiation of a Consideration of Closure/Alteration process as per Section 4 of the policy.

Implications: The school would remain a Gr. K-9 school for September, operating with a significantly reduced staff and predominantly with two groups of students. If the September enrolment is 26 students as earlier shared in Table 12, there would be a Grades 1-4 class with 11 students and a Grade 6-9 class with 15 students. If the September enrolment is 31 students, there would likely be a Grades 1-5 group of 14 students and a Grades 6-9 group of 17 students. There would be 2 to 2.3 teachers and one EA to provide instructional services to the two groups of students, and there would be a part-time office manager position as well. This arrangement would create challenges in the delivery of quality instruction and would not significantly address the Board's financial challenges because of the serious shortfall in grant funding received versus expenses incurred to keep the school open.

Option 2: Keep the School Open with an Altered Program and resulting staff reduction

This option can be decided only if after receipt of and discussion about the Viability Report, the Board decides by way of motion to initiate a Consideration of Closure/Alteration process as per Section 4 of Policy 15. The process will entail an intense effort to consult with staff, parents and community stakeholders and to consolidate their feedback as part of the process in deciding whether or not to close the school or to keep it open with a program alteration through grade reconfiguration. For a Grades K-9 school, there are two typical program alteration pathways that could be taken as identified below.

Option (2a): Shift the school to a K-6 school with Grades 7 – 9 students travelling to Grimshaw with the Grades 10 – 12 students

Implications: All Grades 7-9 students can be accommodated within the classrooms at GPS and can likely be accommodated on the existing buses to Grimshaw. Projected enrolment for a Grades K-6 school is **15** to **19** students (see Table 12). With this option, staff would be reduced to **1.5** teachers and part-time EA and part-time office manager support. The challenges in delivering quality education services

would remain, and the overall financial challenges would be more intense than with Option 1 (keeping the school open as a Grades K-9 school with reduced staff). The existing two-bus system for the K-6 students to Dixonville School would likely still be needed because of the distribution of students across the region and the impact on route times.

Option (2b): Shift to a K-3 school with Grades 4-9 students accompanying the Grades 10-12 students to Grimshaw

Implications: All Grades 4-9 students can be accommodated within the classrooms at GPS but an additional bus might be needed for a Grimshaw run depending on the distribution of the Grades 4-9 students throughout the catchment area. With a small number of students in Grades K-3 (six to eight according to projections in Table 12), one bus would likely be able to transport these students to Dixonville School. With this option, staff would be reduced to one teaching principal (a sole charge school) and maybe partial FTE educational assistant support depending on the needs of the children at school. Also with this option, the financial challenges would still be significant because other than the reduction in staff costs, other costs (custodial, maintenance, operations, transportation) would remain, and overall operational costs would exceed the grant funding generated.

Option 3: Close Dixonville School and transport all students to GPS

This option can be decided only if after receipt of and discussion about the Viability Report, the Board decides by way of motion to initiate a Consideration of Closure/Alteration process as per Section 4 of Policy 15. The process will entail an intense effort to consult with staff, parents and community stakeholders and to consolidate their feedback as part of the process in deciding whether or not to close the school.

Implications: All students can be accommodated there without any additional staffing cost. Furthermore, most operational costs for Dixonville School would be immediately terminated upon school closure, and all would disappear once the property was sold or disposed of. The two bus routes transporting students to Dixonville School would be terminated but given the transportation distances and the geographical distribution of students throughout the Dixonville catchment area, a third bus route would be needed to transport the students to and from Grimshaw. So, four overall routes would be reduced to three. For this three-route bus system, school-of-choice options would still be available to parents and their children.

A brief overview of the options available to the Board of Trustees after receiving and discussing the Viability Report is provided in Table 21.

Table 21: Overview of the Various Options for Dixonville School Subsequent to Consideration of the Viability Report

Option	Staffing Details	Implications
1. Maintain a Grades K-9 School in Dixonville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 to 2.3 Teachers - 1 EA - Part-time Office Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complex multi-grade groupings with 4 or 5-grade splits depending on the actual number of students that register in the school in September - Program delivery challenges resulting from having 4 or 5 grade levels represented in each multi-grade grouping - The ongoing financial challenges will remain because of the serious shortfall in grant revenue to the PRSD versus the cost to operate the school
2. Change to a Grades K-6 School (All Grades 7-9 students can be accommodated in GPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1.5 Teachers - Part-time EA and part-time Office Manager support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complex multi-grade set-up resulting from a single classroom with 15 to 19 Grades 1-6 students (Table 12) - Program delivery challenges resulting from a complex multi-grade grouping - While not reducing the two bus routes to Dixonville School because of distribution of students throughout the catchment area, there might be a need to add an additional route to Grimshaw because of student distribution patterns - Ongoing financial challenges will remain because other than reduction in staff costs, other costs (custodial, maintenance, operations, transportation) remain, and overall operational costs will exceed the grant funding
3. Change to a Grades K-3 School (All Grades 4-9 students can be accommodated in GPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 Teacher - Possible part-time EA depending on specific student needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A three-grade grouping (Gr. 1-3) for next year for six to eight students (Table 12) - Program delivery considerations - There will be one bus route for Dixonville School and a third bus route for the Grimshaw run - Ongoing financial challenges will remain because other than reduction in staff costs, other costs (custodial, maintenance, operations, transportation) remain, and overall operations costs will exceed the grant funding
4. Close the School and transport the students to Grimshaw	No extra staff needed at GPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There will be a need for a third bus run to Grimshaw, so the bus routes will shift from four buses (two for K-9 students to Dixonville School and two to Grimshaw) to three buses to Grimshaw - Financial challenges significantly addressed, but some challenges will remain while the division still owns the closed school - There is no funding available from Alberta Education to assist with demolition of the building if no other parties are interested in it and this cost would need to be covered by the division

Conclusion

This Viability Report has highlighted that with the current Alberta Education three-year Weighted Moving Average (WMA) enrolment Rural Small Schools funding model (and even the newly announced two-year WMA enrolment model moving forward), there will be significant financial challenges in operating Dixonville School with a projected enrolment of just 26 to 31 students for September 2025. The enrolment in this school has steadily declined over the last five years. With a maximum projected enrolment of 31 students for the upcoming school year, the school's two-year WMA enrolment has fallen below the minimum 35 average enrolment threshold to remain qualified for the higher category (Group 2) of block funding that it has qualified for during each of the last five years. Even while qualifying for a higher level of funding in the previous five years, Dixonville School has experienced an operational deficit each year. Operating at a deficit means that to sustain operations within the school, the division's management team were required to redirect funding from other sources that were intended for other purposes.

A shift to a lower level of funding under the two-year WMA enrolment funding model will reduce the funding allocation from \$487,369 in the current school year to \$230,262 for next year (a more than 50% drop in funding). Even with next year's planned reduction in staffing from 8.2 FTE to 3.9 FTE (Table 13) and a change in staffing costs (salaries and benefits costs) from \$575,350 to \$355,988, the expected staff cost deficit will be \$125,736. This deficit amount will be higher if the division decides to hire for another 0.3 FTE teaching unit to create extra capacity to address the more complex multiage programming challenges that will exist within the school. Combined with other operating costs that exceed grant allocations (facilities and transportation costs), the overall shortfall in keeping Dixonville School open will remain significant. If the school does remain open with the same enrolment trend and school-of-choice patterns, the division's management staff will continue to redirect funding to ensure the best possible services to the students we serve. If the decision is to close the school, the division's staff will remain committed to providing excellent educational services for the students who currently attend the school and who will need to enroll in another school for September.